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GEORGE C. MARSHALL: A STUDY IN MENTORSHIP

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

by

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INTRODUCTION

The dramatic events of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the revolutionary changes in the governments of the Soviet Union and eastern European countries will have a significant influence on future size and force structure of the United States Army. What will not change, however, is the Army's primary task to deter war by being prepared to fight and win on the battlefield. The achievement and maintenance of this capability for a highly trained, professional Army is the responsibility of senior leaders. Thus, the requirement to find and develop future senior leaders of wisdom, vision, competence and devotion to the Army and the Nation has never been greater.

The Army has long recognized the importance of the professional development of leaders. The year of leadership proclaimed by Chief of Staff of the Army John A. Wickham, Jr., in 1985 resulted in a renewed examination of leader development and a focus on the concept of mentorship. The Professional Development of Officers Study in the same year examined how Army leaders were developed, both in school institutions and in units. The study noted that the impact of mentoring upon subordinates, whether they be students or

unit leaders, can be significant to the realization of an officer's full potential. It also said much improvement needed to be made.¹ Improving mentorship and developing mentors within the Army thus became a timely topic.

The purpose of this study is to examine mentorship of future senior leaders. How should current Army senior leaders indentify and mentor those officers who show the most potential for senior leadership of the future Army? First, a working model will be defined complete with functions and behaviors. The model will then be used to examine the mentorship style of General of the Army George C. Marshall. This is particularly appropriate since General Marshall mentored numerous officers during the interwar years who later distinguished themselves in senior command positions during World War II. Finally, an analysis will discuss General Marshall's style in the contemporary Army of today. Are his techniques still valid today? What can we still use and what must we modify to suit our leader development needs today to groom future senior leaders?

MENTORING - A WORKING DEFINITION

Mentoring came in vogue in the early 1980's. Numerous professional journal articles described mentoring relationships, mentoring stages and mentoring effects. Nevertheless, there was at the time little conceptual clarity about what was meant by mentoring. Roles such as coaches or sponsors were used interchangeably with mentors to the point that most supervisory duties included some aspects of "mentoring."

The origin of "mentor" is from both the Greek language and Greek mythology. Prior to departing for the Trojan Wars, Homer's Odysseus asked his trusted friend Mentor to tutor his son Telemachus until he returned. Mentor accepted total responsibility for ensuring that Telemachus received all the education and guidance required to assume the head of the household.² Hence, mentoring has come to mean a relationship between a senior person (mentor) and a young adult (protégé) where the senior member of the relationship plays a major role in shaping and molding the younger member

in his professional career.³ How is this different from a "coach" or "sponsor?"

Almost exclusively associated with a senior-subordinate relationship, a coach is concerned with specific growth needs and uses performance appraisals and career counseling to keep his subordinate clearly informed of what is expected and of the progress toward each established goal.⁴

Whereas coaches prepare individuals for current duties, sponsors discover and prepare individuals for enhanced placement in other parts of the organization. Thus, sponsors enhance a subordinate's career progression by giving them visibility and actively seeking promotional opportunities for them. Caution must be exercised to ensure promotion is keyed to performance and future potential rather than promotion as a result of who one knows.⁵

The mentor-protégé relationship is characterized by much greater intensity, informality and trust than either the coach or sponsor relationships.

Caring is the core of this relationship. The protégé cares because of the help received and thus affection and respect may be influenced by gratitude. The mentor cares as the parent cares.⁶

The most common traits that characterize a mentor and differentiate him from the protege are age, and organizational position.⁷

Mentors are usually older than their protege by a half a generation, roughly eight to fifteen years. If the age difference exceeds twenty, the relationship becomes more of a parent-child and would interfere with mentor functions. On the other hand, age differences of less than six to eight years are highly likely to cause participants to treat each other as peers, thereby minimizing the mentoring aspects.⁸

Mentors are often highly placed within the organization, are powerful, and are knowledgeable individuals who are not threatened by the protege's potential for equaling or surpassing them. Typically mentors are two or more levels above their proteges and would be more experienced in dealing with the uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that exists in the organization and are, therefore, more capable of equipping their protege to effectively and successfully work in such an environment.⁹

But probably the best way to bring the aspect of mentoring into clearer view would be to depart from characteristic analyses and focus on what mentors do --

their behavior. Supervisory Magazine in April 1983

identified ten behaviors in mentoring:10

- TEACHING: teaching a protege specific job skills for career development and growth.
- GUIDING: providing a protege with the unwritten rules, politics, and desired behavior of the organization.
- ADVISING: giving the protege advice from the mentor's frame of reference.
- SPONSORING: advertising protege's skills and talents so that career opportunities can be achieved.
- MOTIVATING: use of techniques to improve protege's self-confidence to go on and accomplish goals.
- PROTECTING: creating an environment that the protege can take risks without the fear of failure.
- COMMUNICATING: inherent in all other behaviors.
- VALIDATING: confirming right or wrong, good or bad.
- COUNSELING: providing emotional support; career planning.
- ROLE MODELING: transmittal of professional and/or personal values to emulate.

Must a mentoring relationship include all such behaviors? Majority? Some? Perhaps the central issue is not quantity, but quality.

Ms. Kathy Kram's study gives us a better perspective by dividing the functions into two broad categories -- career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions result from the mentor's experience, organizational rank, and influence in the organizational context, while psychosocial functions result from an interpersonal relationship that promotes trust and even intimacy.¹¹

Career functions are those aspects of the relationship that enhance career development:

SPONSORSHIP: actively nominating an individual for desirable lateral moves and promotions.

EXPOSURE and VISIBILITY: assigning responsibilities that allow proteges to develop relationships with key figures in the organization.

COACHING: a senior's performance counseling for accomplishing work objectives, for achieving recognition, and for achieving career aspirations.

PROTECTION: shields the protege from untimely or potentially damaging contact with other seniors.

CHALLENGING ASSIGNMENTS: a job-related function that often places the mentor in the role of teacher because of the technical knowledge and useful feedback provided to the protege.¹²

Psychosocial functions, on the other hand, are those functions that enhance a sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role.

ROLE MODELING: a senior's attitudes, values, and behavior provide a model for the protege to emulate.

ACCEPTANCE AND CONFIRMATION: support by the senior that encourages risk taking by the protege with little fear of rejection due to failure.

COUNSELING: enables exploration of personal concerns that may interfere with a positive sense of self within the organization.

FRIENDSHIP: social interaction that results in mutual liking and understanding.¹³

The range of mentoring functions or roles that enhance development can vary depending on the needs of both the mentor and protege, the interpersonal skills brought to the relationship and finally the organizational context which may, or may not, allow opportunities for interaction.¹⁴ This is particularly true with the military organization, but as Lieutenant General Charles W. Baghal astutely relates mentorship to the military, long-term career development relationships are not typical to the military profession. Rather, mentorship as a style of leadership puts it in proper context. A mentorship style of leadership is "characterized by open communication with subordinates, role modeling of appropriate values, the effective use of counseling for subordinate development and sharing of the leader's frame of reference with subordinate leaders."¹⁵ This meaning gives a better understanding to General

Wickham's challenge to "Be a teacher and mentor to the officers, NCO's and civilians entrusted to you."¹⁶

This certainly relates to Ms. Kram's career functions, but falls short of including all of the psychosocial functions. While mentorship can occur within the chain-of-command, it is rare for a senior-subordinate relationship to develop a special relationship of trust required in mentoring and not cross the line of favoritism which would be detrimental to the organization.¹⁷ While a mentorship may begin in a senior-subordinate role, the full meaning of the psychosocial functions may come later, particularly the counseling and friendship functions. Every mentorship will be different because of the different personalities, backgrounds and capabilities involved. The absence of one or more functions does not disqualify the relationship from being classified as one of mentorship. More on this later.

One final note on mentorship is appropriate at this point. All subordinates need to be coached, taught or counseled by their superiors. However, mentorship should be initiated with those individuals whose attitudes, intelligence, and other attributes are so special that their potential to the Army makes them deserving of special

grooming. Prestige jobs such as aide-de-camp and executive assistant are important in this regard so that the protege has the opportunity to learn from close and continuous contact what the mentor might have learned over 25 to 30 years or more. This process ensures their potential is realized and beneficially used at all levels within the Army to make the Army better, more effective and more combat ready.¹⁸

We now have a useful definition of the mentorship process including the behaviors and functions that have served to identify this special relationship between a mentor and his protege. We will now examine General Marshall's mentoring techniques to highlight similarities and differences that may be appropriate for a better understanding of contemporary mentorship.

MARSHALL'S STYLE OF MENTORSHIP

Prior to a practical examination of General Marshall's style of mentorship, it is useful to gain an appreciation of how Marshall was mentored by General of the Armies John J. Pershing. This rationale is in line with one researcher who suggested that the first-line supervisor teaches the subordinate's job while the mentor teaches the protege to do the mentor's job.¹⁹

Pershing first noticed Marshall in October 1917 during a visit to see a 1st Division presentation on a new method of attacking entrenched troops. With a poor briefing and an even poorer analysis, Pershing first treated the division commander, Major General William L. Sibert, very severely in front of all the officers, and then did the same to the new Chief of Staff. Marshall, insensed at what happened, was determined to explain the true facts to Pershing. Marshall's detailed and forceful presentation impressed him. "... thereafter when Pershing visited the division he would often take Marshall aside to ask him how things were going.

In the months following it was clear that the general's respect and liking grew."20

In April 1919, Pershing selected Marshall to be his aide-de-camp. Thus

Marshall embarked on one of the longest tours of his Army career. For more than five years -- to within three months of Pershing's retirement in October 1924-- Marshall would stand as a kind of personal Chief of Staff.21

In fact, this was not the only time Marshall had the prestigious job as a general's aide. He was first an aide to Brigadier General Hunter Liggett in 1915, General J. Franklin Bell in 1916 and finally Pershing in 1919.22 He was in an unique position to learn from senior leaders about the unwritten rules of the organization, the personalities and the social behaviors that are important to success. The most significant impact, however, came from the time with Pershing. Numerous vignettes can be written of the career and psychosocial functions that Marshall experienced, but the entirety of it all was recounted by Marshall when he wrote to Pershing in 1924.

My five years with you will always remain the unique experience of my career... Not until I ... took up these duties ... did I realize how much my long association was going to mean to me and how deeply I will miss it.23

Marshall continued this legacy of mentorship as a senior officer. His selection of worthy proteges was particularly astute. As Katherine T. Marshall, his spouse, recalls,

My husband's four years at (Ft.) Benning, where he had been in close association with hundreds of young officers, were of incalculable value later in choosing his higher commanders. He has always said that he possesses a wicked memory; and this is true -- he never forgets a brilliant performance and he never forgets a dullard. Mediocrity seems to make little impression on him, except by way of momentary irritation.²⁴

Such identification of promising officers was key to Marshall's role as a sponsoring and promoting mentor.

It is well known that Marshall kept a black book in which from time to time he crossed off a name and moved up or added that of another. The black book was a little needed crutch to a well charged memory that still contained the names of classmates from Fort Leavenworth, colleagues in France, instructors and students at Fort Benning, dozens of men whom he saw on every visit to maneuvers.²⁵

The importance of this book can be seen in one historian's count of over 50 faculty and 150 students who passed through to Fort Benning, when Marshall was assistant commandant, who later became general officers.²⁶

When he was assistant commandant of the Infantry School Marshall selected Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Joseph

W. Stilwell as head of the Tactics Department. In fact Marshall wanted him so badly that he held the position open for a year until "Vinegar Joe" became available.²⁷ Stilwell recalls that Marshall was assembling a faculty of similar mind "who would be willing to experiment, to accept new solutions, to welcome the unorthodox if it showed that the student was thinking for himself in the field."²⁸ Stilwell relished his time with Marshall at Fort Benning as a time for new ideas, argument, and active thinking about military development. "In the presence of a future wartime Chief of Staff they were incomparable as a nursery of high command."²⁹ Marshall was training his faculty as well as his students for greater responsibilities for the future World War.

Lieutenant Colonel (later General of the Army) Omar N. Bradley was another distinguished faculty member as Chief of Weapons Section at Fort Benning. Bradley gives us a view of Marshall's simplistic method of coaching. "Marshall said little or nothing to me about my new duties -- when he gave a man a job, he let him alone -- but I was inspired to do my absolute utmost."³⁰

One might hastily assume that absence of guidance is coaching. On the other hand, Marshall was skilled in

recognizing unlimited potential in aspiring young officers and in giving them the widest latitude in challenging duties so that their fullest potential could be realized. This technique continued with Omar Bradley while he was working for Marshall on the General Staff. Bradley's job, with two others, was to read mounds of paperwork and decide what needed to go to Marshall, then Chief of Staff, and what did not. If it did, they prepared a one page summary and orally briefed Marshall. Marshall was steadfast in his desire for them not only to make recommendations, but also to assume responsibilities and make independent decisions.³¹

Marshall treated Dwight D. Eisenhower in a similar fashion. Eisenhower first became known to Marshall in 1930 when he talked to Marshall in the office of the American Battle Monuments Commission in Washington. In late 1941, Marshall needed a new Chief of Operations Division in the War Department. As Eisenhower recalled his first interview,

Marshall said the department is filled with able men who analyze their problems well but feel compelled always to bring them to me for final solution. I must have assistants who will solve their own problems and tell me later what they have done. I resolved then and there, Eisenhower said later, to do my work to the best of my ability and report to the General only situations of obvious necessity or when he personally sent for me.³²

The career function of sponsorship was also practiced quite frequently by Marshall with his proteges. Marshall sponsored Eisenhower for the North African command in World War II and subsequent four-star rank in the Mediterranean. Dr. Forrest C. Poque, Marshall's biographer, writes, "Although it was true that Marshall had not (initially) selected Eisenhower in the beginning for the Supreme Commander's post (late 1943), he had certainly put him on the way to that position, and he as much as any other man was responsible for his reaching that goal."³³

Again, when Marshall submitted his retirement request to President Truman on 20 August 1945, he wrote, "If I may be permitted to propose a successor, I suggest that General Eisenhower is unusually well qualified for the duties of Chief of Staff at this particular time."³⁴ Eisenhower was selected to replace Marshall.

Bradley, then a Lieutenant Colonel, was working for Marshall when he was offered a job as commandant of troops at West Point. Marshall indicated to Bradley that he did not think much of that idea. Instead Marshall offered him the opportunity to become assistant commandant at the Infantry School, a brigadier general's position. Three

months later, Bradley was promoted to brigadier general, never having been a colonel.³⁵

One can say that the previous vignettes, where Marshall performed his career functions with his proteges, may be considered those activities that a senior will normally perform with his subordinates. He will coach, expose, protect, sponsor and give them challenging assignments. What then distinguishes true mentorship? Kram suggests it is the presence and experience of the psychosocial function -- the close, interpersonal relationship between the mentor and his protege. Within this function, role modeling is the most frequently reported experience.³⁶

With Eisenhower, Marshall provides a role model who was devoted to the concept that duty performance, and nothing else, earns rewards. Marshall's feeling on performance and promotion was "if he hadn't delivered, he wouldn't have moved up."³⁷ Bradley put his perspective in a similar fashion.

From General Marshall I learned the rudiments of effective command. Throughout the war I deliberately avoided intervening in a subordinate's duties. When an officer performed as I expected him to, I gave him a free hand. When he hesitated, I tried to help him. And when he failed, I relieved him.³⁸

One might expect that under these circumstances a subordinate could easily develop a fear of failure. Quite the contrary, Marshall encouraged risk taking by his proteges with little fear of rejection or failure. In a message sent to Eisenhower prior to the invasion of North Africa, Marshall wrote,

When you disagree with my point of view, say so, without an apologetic approach; when you want something that you aren't getting, tell me and I will try and get it for you. I have complete confidence in your management of the affair, and want to support you in every way practicable.³⁹

The one psychosocial function that Marshall may not have fully embraced was the social interaction that results in mutual liking and understanding -- friendship. While Marshall and Eisenhower had great respect and admiration for each other, they never developed as warm a friendship as the one Marshall had with Pershing. Marshall and Stilwell relationship also grew into a bond of mutual respect.

Of any other two men the relationship might have been called a friendship, but these two closed personalities left few references to each other at this stage, and Marshall was not a man easily claimed as a friend. A graduate of Virginia Military Institute, courtly and distant, closing all conversations with his cool 'Thank you very much,' he never called anyone by his first name and rarely got the last name straight.⁴⁰

Does the absence of true friendship leave an unexplicable void in Marshall's mentorship style? I think not. Marshall may have been a bit short on friendship, but long on caring. As Mrs. Mark Clark expressed her thoughts on this side of Marshall:

Throughout the war years General Marshall as Chief of Staff was a great comfort to the wives and families he knew personally. Despite the terrible burden of responsibility and his work as Chief of Staff... he always tried to find time to pass along word of the officers to their families. He made me and many other wives feel that our Army had a heart and soul and that our husbands were something more than mere numbers dropped into the slot for which their training fit them.⁴¹

Thus, we have seen the true mastery of the Marshall style of mentorship. For his Army and his nation, Marshall sought and developed extraordinary young officers who later made their own mark in history during World War II. Marshall's influence that resulted in his unique mentorship - both career and psychosocial - can never be fully measured. His efforts made an indelible mark on many an outstanding officer. As Omar Bradley spoke of General Marshall, he put it quite simply, "No man had a greater influence on me personally or professionally."⁴²

MODEL ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the applicability of the Marshall style of mentoring to the contemporary Army of today first needs to restate the purpose of mentorship viz-a-viz the professional development of officers throughout the Army.

All officers in the Army need to be developed professionally. Many of the components of the mentoring model can be emphasized effectively today--teaching, coaching, role modeling, and perhaps to some extent sponsoring. The nature of the profession of arms makes personal interest and involvement paramount in the development of subordinate officers. The term "mentoring" has been applied to this style of leadership expected of senior officers. However, a more accurate statement of the objective of mentoring is for senior leaders to identify and mentor those officers who show the most potential for senior leadership of the future Army. Thus, true mentoring is for the specific purpose to groom officers with the most potential for the most responsible positions in the Army.

The first technique in Marshall's style of mentoring that is valid today is that of identification. Marshall noted those officers whose commitment to success, personal discipline, and physical and mental abilities warranted notation in his infamous black book. This process was continuous as officers received recurring observations and were stricken or added to his list by Marshall's personal judgement. The officer personnel files maintained by the Army Personnel Command is inadequate for this type of identification. While these files can discriminate for promotion, school selection and assignment orders, mentoring requires a personal evaluation by a senior leader to determine a potential protege's qualifications and potential both professionally and personally. This remains as valid today as it was during Marshall's time.

Similar to Marshall's experience with General Pershing, so too did Marshall's technique include exposure to higher echelons. Marshall's proteges had the opportunity to observe senior leaders in action first hand. It was not enough to be told how things are done. The best form of learning occurred through personal observation, a sharing of a leader's frames of reference and appropriate values.

Marshall's techniques also included giving the widest latitude to his proteges. It was not Marshall's intent to clone his proteges in his own image. Rather, he wanted them to develop their own leadership style by encouraging them to think and take risks. Marshall trained them for their current job, but all the while trained them in line with future responsibilities Marshall had in mind.

Finally, Marshall's techniques involved all career and psychosocial functions of the mentoring model. While many officers benefitted from Marshall's wisdom and selected experiences, only a few received the full gamut of mentoring behaviors. They benefitted from each function individually, but also cherished the full relationship with Marshall that would mold and guide them in greater responsibilities during World War II. Today's mentoring efforts also should include these time-tested behaviors. Not only must the protege's development include career functions, but he must also experience the psychosocial functions to gain an interpersonal relationship with his mentor. This exposure enhances trust, a sense of competence and professional identity.

Many of Marshall's techniques, on the other hand, need modification to suit our leader development needs in today's environment.

Marshall's mentoring process often included multiple, direct exposure to his protege over an established period of time. This facilitated the cultivation phase where the mentor-protege relationship matured. The constant turbulence in today's Army caused by our current assignment equity practices, dual specialty requirements, overseas and joint experiences, makes such long term, direct exposure between mentor and protege quite difficult to know people long enough to gain the trust and confidence that need to be attained for the tutorial relationship, or mentoring, to exist. Today, mentors and proteges alike must make special efforts to nurture their relationship in various ways to gain similar results. Correspondance, telephonic contact, and periodic personal visits can be used effectively to sustain a mentoring relationship. Use of multiple mentor-protege relationships may become increasingly important as a means of development of future senior Army leaders rather than a single, dominant one prevalent in Marshall's time.

The complexity of today's warfighting doctrine places unique demands on mentoring. Marshall's mentoring focus on leadership, command of large field formations, and unit readiness now must include insights in planning and conducting complex joint operations with other services, the increased lethality and mobility of modern weapon systems and military application in space operations. The multiple focuses of what future senior leaders need to know is staggering and does place increased demands of the mentoring process.

Finally, how a mentor sponsors his protege today must be modified. Problems arise with misconceptions about what sponsoring is, what it does, and how the process works. Since sponsoring can have such a detrimental effect on the organization, recent personnel management procedures have lessened the mentor's wide use of his influence in his protege's career progression. While one would be naive to presume this practice has been eliminated, its use today is much more selective in frequency of occurrence than during Marshall's time.

General of the Army George C. Marshall has a special place in American history. His performance of duty during

his career in critical assignments of government is unequalled. His most unique talent, however, was his vision of the future. He envisioned what capabilities the Army needed to have and the abilities of the officers the Army needed to lead it. His mentoring efforts on selected officers instilled the concepts of being a professional, commitment to standards of performance that are self-enforced, self-restraint and self-sacrifice, loyalty down and duty first. It was these men that Marshall touched who brought us the glorious victory in World War II. Today's Army leaders can learn from Marshall's style of mentoring, share and practice them. Only then can the Army develop the officers it needs to fulfill the responsibilities the American people entrust to senior Army leaders--prepare the Army to deter war, fight if necessary, and win.

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