

# BEYOND WORDS: LEADER SELF-AWARENESS AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**BEYOND WORDS: LEADER SELF-AWARENESS AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Being self aware and using interpersonal skills will be significant to leader success given the 2006 release of the Army's new mandate to create, develop, and nurture a different kind of Army leader. The Army's goal for growing leaders to meet the strategic challenges of the 21st Century is to develop the "Pentathlete". Success in the future Army environment will be measured by the leader's ability to build relationships with various governmental interagency, military multinational and non-governmental organizations. These organizations will not be as familiar with the tactical and technical skills that are well honed within our military leadership. Rather, interpersonal skills will be the equalizer as pentathlete leaders cross cultures striving to build consensus and accomplish missions. Mounting corporate and military research continues to show that leaders backseat self-awareness and interpersonal skills in favor of tactical and technical ones. This imbalance equates to short changing the possibilities for leaders to build future leaders and teams - a disturbing paradigm in light of the Army's transformed environment of the Pentathlete leader. Several recommendations are explored to enhance and improve leader self-awareness and interpersonal behaviors to build trust, openness and increased ownership and productivity.



## BEYOND WORDS: LEADER SELF-AWARENESS AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS.

How do you really gauge the effectiveness of your leadership? Is it the promotions and selection to various critical positions throughout your career? What about your keen ability to successfully complete the numerous objectives and tasks that were cited on your evaluation reports? Think again. What about your self-awareness and interpersonal skills? How do your people really perceive you and why does it matter? Here's how one senior officer perceived the Central Command Commander in the post September 11 environment where he worked:

“He ran an extremely unhappy headquarters. He tended to berate subordinates, frequently shouting and cursing at them. Morale was poor, and people were tired, having worked nonstop since 9/11. Central Command is two thousand indentured servants whose life is consumed by the whims of Tommy Franks. Staff officers are conditioned like Pavlovian dogs. You can only resist for so long. It's like a prisoner-of-war camp – after a while, you break.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the most tangible assets within all leaders is their ability to be self-aware and to use effective interpersonal skills to shape their professional environment. All too often leaders pay little attention to these skills and the subordinates pay the price - suffering in an environment that lacks teamwork and productivity.

Leaders who lack self-awareness and the ability to use their interpersonal skills produce a toxic atmosphere of mistrust. Once trust erodes and openness disappears, the leader becomes ineffective and so does the organization. “The highest form of discipline is the willing obedience of subordinates who trust their leaders, understand and believe in the mission's purpose, value the team and their place in it, and have the will to see the mission through.”<sup>2</sup> Just one-third of officers and soldiers surveyed in the “Military Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” Study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in 1998-1999 agreed that an atmosphere of trust existed between leaders and subordinates.<sup>3</sup> Day and Lord concluded that executive leaders do have a substantial impact on organizational performance.<sup>4</sup> Their research noted that creating an organizational climate and culture that motivates and retains employees is crucial.<sup>5</sup> Lack of trust becomes a quiet, unseen virus in organizations because of the lack of attention leaders place on their own self-awareness. Their focus is on accomplishing the numerous material tasks that mount up daily.

Lost in the task-focused atmosphere are the personal dimensions that are the real glue of the team. Research by Clement and Ayres identified nine dimensions that comprise a matrix of organizational leadership functions required for organizations to operate effectively.<sup>6</sup> The most critical of these leadership and management dimensions was communication.<sup>7</sup> Central within the communication dimension were the interpersonal skills of listening with empathy, focusing

upon your ability to be persuasive, delivering interpersonal feedback, reading nonverbal as well as verbal cues, and utilizing informal networks (e.g., the grapevine).<sup>8</sup> Clement and Ayres also found that the more leaders identify with their role, the more influential they will be toward their subordinates.<sup>9</sup> A leader's self-awareness and interpersonal skills can shape leaders and build teams only if they understand themselves and take the risk to understand others.

Being self aware and using interpersonal skills will be significant to leader success given the 2006 release of the Army's new mandate to create, develop, and nurture a different kind of Army leader.<sup>10</sup> The Army's goal for growing leaders to meet the strategic challenges of the 21st Century is to develop the "Pentathlete". This Pentathlete personifies the Warrior Ethos in all aspects, from war fighting to statesmanship to business management. The Army Vision lays out four means to achieve success under this Pentathlete model: Soldiers, Leaders, Modular Forces and The Institution. Of these four areas, the Leader will likely be the center of gravity to accomplish future strategic missions. This leader-focused pursuit is marked by the Army's renewed emphasis on developing a multi-skilled professional with specific leader attributes.

Future leaders—both Army and civilian—who pursue a "Pentathlete" career path will evolve into the new military progressives and lead efforts to transform the Army for the years to come. The uncertainty of the new world order demands leaders that are well educated and capable of adapting the Army to a wide variety of potential missions and environments. One of the six pentathlete skills: *builder of leaders and teams* forms the foundation by which all leaders will need to be effective in the future warfighting environment. To develop this *builder of leaders and teams* skill, one must understand how to develop oneself and other individuals.

Lacking the skills to build leaders and teams will jeopardize success in the other five pentathlete skills. Army Chief of Staff General Peter J. Schoomaker often uses the team sport metaphor when explaining the military leader qualities necessary for excellence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> His track and football athlete/ team reflections bring home the point that strong, well-conditioned athletes influence an equally robust team. Success in the future Army environment will be measured by the leader's ability to build relationships with various governmental interagency, military multinational and non-governmental organizations. These organizations will not be as familiar with the tactical and technical skills that are well honed within our military leadership. Rather, interpersonal skills will be the equalizer as pentathlete leaders cross cultures striving to build consensus and accomplish missions.<sup>12</sup>



## Self-Awareness and Interpersonal Skills – More than a Concept

The importance of self-awareness and interpersonal skills are documented in the Army's revised field manual on leadership. The manual introduces the term "interpersonal tact" as a conceptual component of leader intelligence.<sup>13</sup> Defined, interpersonal tact refers to having a capacity to understand the interactions with others; possessing self-awareness about how others perceive you and how to best to interact with them.<sup>14</sup> Interpersonal tact relies on accepting the character, reactions, and motives of oneself and others while recognizing diversity and displaying self-control, balance, and stability in all situations.<sup>15</sup> Leaders who invest their interpersonal skills develop close teams who complete missions on time and minimize wasted effort.<sup>16</sup> During combat, cohesive teams maximize effectiveness and take fewer casualties.<sup>17</sup> Bernard Bass, a renowned leadership theorist, reveals that throughout history an officer's ability to create mutual respect, teamwork, and unit cohesion are crucial to successful combat performance.<sup>18</sup>

Leader self-awareness and interpersonal skills are much more than conceptual doctrine. They are essential skills that strategic leaders must apply to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century environment. While self-awareness techniques and interpersonal skills may be documented and vaguely familiar, this paper will present evidence that these ideals are not being applied by today's military leaders to the degree of maximizing effective leaders and teams.

The purpose of the paper is to make a comprehensive contribution to improving understanding of the criticality of leader self-awareness and interpersonal skills to building future leaders and teams. While this concept is easily accepted amongst leaders, the notion is often wrongly conceptualized which leads to errors in the basic understanding that promote undue pessimism on our part. Mounting corporate and military research continues to show that leaders backseat self-awareness and interpersonal skills in favor of tactical and technical ones. This imbalance equates to short changing the possibilities for leaders to build future leaders and teams - a disturbing paradigm in light of the Army's transformed environment of the Pentathlete leader.

The discussion is organized into areas framing an argument that a crisis exists as leaders lack the courage to become more self-aware and subsequently fail to use interpersonal abilities to connect and truly influence their subordinates. This paper begins by examining the corporate and military research regarding the importance of leader self-awareness and interpersonal skills. Then, causes of interpersonal shortfalls and key interpersonal skills for strategic leaders are explored. The concluding portion of this paper proposes several recommendations to

enhance and improve a leader's self-awareness and interpersonal skills to build trust, openness and increased ownership and productivity.

### The Corporate Case for Self-Awareness and Interpersonal Skills

There is a body of research in the corporate world that emphasizes the importance of self awareness and interpersonal skills to success. This literature shows that corporate senior leaders continually underutilize or are unaware of their interpersonal skills and how these skills translate into a major component of effective leadership.

In their 2006 study, *The 6 Qs of Leadership*, Robert Eichinger and Michael Lombardo found that self-awareness and interpersonal skills were vital to lasting success amongst managers and executives. They referred to these skills as the "people quotient" which translated into how well you handle yourself and work with others. The authors found that there is a link between self awareness and success. If you are aware of your strengths and weaknesses, this increases your chances for success when working with others who rely on your leadership.

The people quotient has three aspects of understanding that a leader must master to be effective: self-management, openness to others, and interpersonal effectiveness.<sup>19</sup> Self management involves seeking and acting on feedback; understanding how your actions, beliefs, values and intentions are seen by others; and then taking necessary steps to ensure they are viewed in a positive light.<sup>20</sup> Openness to others includes tailoring your behaviors to what motivates individuals. The goal is to encourage dissent; showing genuine interest in people's perspectives and integrating them into the final decisions. Interpersonal effectiveness involves the ability to work with and through people. Traits of effectiveness include an inspirational attitude, creating a sense of shared meaning, and motivating others to work together.<sup>21</sup>

The authors further collected data on executives over a ten year period concluding that most do not efficiently utilize their interpersonal skills. Three observations were noted as relevant.<sup>22</sup> First, the lack of interpersonal skills is the most prevalent reason for the downfall of formerly promising leaders. Second, six of the top ten reasons for executive failure were attributed to interpersonal deficits. These include over managing, insensitivity, defensiveness, arrogance, the failure to build teams and lack of composure. And third, interpersonal skills ranked among the lowest of leader competencies as measured by the results of 360 degree assessments. Weak competencies included patience, understanding others, self-knowledge, and listening.

Business leaders reveal consistent patterns of interpersonal failures of over the past decade as cited by various researchers in the human behavior field. Jack Zinger and Joe Folkman recognized five fatal flaws that lead to leadership failure, one of which was the lack of core interpersonal skills.<sup>23</sup> Lombardo and Eichinger in their 2002 research found that over the past ten years five traits have led to stalled careers for executives. Three of these five traits were interpersonal skills related: not relating well with others, self-centered, and lacking the ability to inspire or build talent.<sup>24</sup> Dan Goleman, a psychologist and best selling author says his research proves that people are promoted for technical/operational reasons, but fail for emotional (interpersonal) ones.<sup>25</sup> In 1998, Goleman's study of 181 competence models found that 67 percent of the abilities essential for effective performance of managers were emotional (interpersonal) competencies.<sup>26</sup>

The Center of Creative Leadership discovered that executives who failed were likely to have low people-relating skills. They could not build teams or maintain productive relationships with others. Additionally, executives were overly reactive, impatient, or unable to delegate, engage or motivate.<sup>27</sup> Research by Lombardo and McCauley found that factors leading to managerial failure were condensed into six basic cluster flaws, one of which was problems with interpersonal relationships.<sup>28</sup> Interpersonal problems were reflected in four areas: (a) over ambition – alienating others on the way up, or worrying more about getting a promotion than about doing the current job; (b) independence – being a know-it-all, or isolating oneself from others; (c) abrasiveness – bullying, insensitivity, or lack of caring; and (d) lack of composure – being volatile and unpredictable toward others, often under pressure.<sup>29</sup> Their conclusion was that interpersonal flaws are more likely to affect a person's ability to handle jobs requiring persuasion or the development of new relationships.<sup>30</sup>

These studies and research reinforce the benefits of leader self-awareness and the prioritization of interpersonal skills in leading others. The findings also suggest that good leaders differ from bad leaders in consistent ways. In his continuing research on common personality flaws and their impact on failure, Robert Hogan asserts that there is no difference in intelligence or personality patterns across levels.<sup>31</sup> However, Hogan argues that personality is a worthy indicator of the difference between good and poor leaders. Good and poor leaders differ consistently because personality factors are much better predictors of performance than cognitive ability. As leaders progress in their careers, the ability to accomplish tasks with and through others increases in importance. Military research parallels the civilian studies asserting that self awareness and interpersonal skills are underutilized by leaders and appreciated most by subordinates.

## The Military Case for Self-Awareness and Interpersonal Skills

The Army has had a natural tendency to emphasize mission accomplishment over the effectiveness of the organization and its people. Success is often focused on tangible tasks that can be seen and evaluated.<sup>32</sup> One recent U.S. Army War College study chose to look closely at the unseen characteristics that make up effective leaders.

The study, “*Leadership Lessons at Division Command Level – 2004*” concluded that senior leaders needed to pay as much attention to the development of interpersonal skills as military systems have placed on the development of technical and tactical skills.<sup>33</sup> The report examined the leadership of four division commanders and another 73 associated senior officers (6 brigadier generals, 22 colonels, 30 lieutenant colonels, 11 majors, and 4 captains) who recently completed their tours in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Specifically, the study purpose was two-fold: identify what specific leader behaviors were essential in creating a climate that supported mission accomplishment while also motivating people to continue their military service, and recognize what subset of leader behaviors carried the most weight in distinguishing between “Good” and “Poor” leaders.<sup>34</sup> At the subordinate level, the study attempted to develop an understanding of exactly what *behaviors* were behind subordinate perceptions of leader quality, and the impact and significance of these behaviors to the group or team.<sup>35</sup>

Of the findings and observations, three were noteworthy in relationship to leader interpersonal skills. First, as participants listed essential leader behaviors in order of relative importance, those directly related to interpersonal skills were seen to be more important than those in the tactical and technical areas.<sup>36</sup> The top eight behaviors were: encouraging (helping others to achieve more than they thought they were capable of achieving); trustworthy (is trusted by individuals and groups in conflict to be a fair mediator); teacher (communicates critical information needed by groups to perform well); coach (gives constructive feedback in a way that benefits individuals); credible (believable, ethical, trustworthy, has few hidden motives); listens well (open and responsive when receiving ideas from others); persuasive (presents new ideas in ways that create “buy-in” from necessary constituencies) and mentoring (provides challenging assignments and related coaching).<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, there were generalized differences in levels of competence between interpersonal and tactical skills. The study discovered that the essence of military effectiveness (tactical and technical competencies) rests on a foundation of interpersonal competencies.<sup>38</sup> In this new era of the Army pentathlete, higher level leader competence is essential to ensuring that transformed and restructured forces can meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Enhancing the interpersonal skills of leaders seems more necessary than ever.

Third, there were consistently recognizable behavioral differences between the perceived “Good” and the “Poor” leaders. These differences predominately rested in the interpersonal area.<sup>39</sup> The study group used a leader behavior preference (LBP) worksheet to allow each participant to indicate which seven of the 29 listed behaviors (or one of their own) most differentiated between “Good” leaders who always displayed the behavior, and “Poor” leaders who rarely displayed the behavior. Another commercial instrument, the Campbell Leadership Descriptor (CLD), asked individuals to describe themselves compared to a “Good” and a “Poor” leader they had known. The CLD included 40 specific behaviors and was designed to enhance self-awareness. The interviews, LBP and CLD findings overwhelmingly concluded that skills in the interpersonal area were the key discriminators between “Good” and “Poor” leaders.<sup>40</sup>

The Division Commanders study found that field grade and general officers did not possess the interpersonal skills required to apply optimally their strong tactical and technical skills. Another Army study, the Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP), looked at a greater population and found similar weaknesses in leader self-awareness and interpersonal skills.

The ATLDP report: Consolidation Phase released in August 2005, noted leader deficiencies in self-awareness and interpersonal skills as they applied to effective leadership. This report consisted of over one million data points and spanned a four-year period beginning in mid-2000. The ATLDP recognized that the identification and development of interpersonal skills for current and future Army leaders must become a priority for the Army and other services. Unlike the U.S. Army War College Division Commander’s study which focused mostly on senior and general officers, the ATLDP discovered that weaknesses of self-awareness and applying interpersonal skills were found in the wider Army community: officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), warrant officers and Army civilians.

The ATLDP found that leader self awareness will be one of the Army’s strategy-based competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>41</sup> The report concluded that future leaders will need to effectively influence a wider diversity of individuals and entities such as other cultures and civilian organizations. Within the self development section, the report cites that leaders must be self aware.<sup>42</sup> The ambiguous nature of the operational environment requires Army leaders who know themselves. They must be able to assess their own capabilities, determine their own strengths and weaknesses, and actively learn to overcome their weaknesses.<sup>43</sup> Beyond being knowledgeable in the tactical and technical realms, the future leader will need to be highly skilled in interpersonal behaviors.<sup>44</sup> Central to these interpersonal skills are the application of listening, conflict resolution, mediation, and negotiation.<sup>45</sup>

One of the major products produced by the ATLDP Consolidation Phase report was the Army Core Leader Competence Framework. This framework establishes a core model of desired leadership roles and actions for the Army. Its purpose is to define what functions leaders must perform to make themselves and others in their organization organizationally effective.<sup>46</sup> Eight competencies and their related components make up the framework. What is noteworthy about these competencies is that seven of the eight have a strong relationship to self-awareness and interpersonal skills. Table one below highlights this point.<sup>47</sup>

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Components</b>
Modeling Sound Values and Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understand the importance of conceptual skills and model them to others.</li> <li>- Seek and be open to diverse ideas and points of view</li> </ul>
Shaping a Positive Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foster team work, cohesion, cooperation and loyalty.</li> <li>- Encourage subordinates to exercise initiative, accept responsibility, and take ownership</li> <li>- Encourage open and candid communications</li> <li>- Express and demonstrate care for people and their well being</li> <li>- Accept reasonable setbacks and failures</li> </ul>
Ensuring Shared Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Listen actively</li> <li>- Determine information sharing strategies</li> <li>- Employ engaging communications</li> <li>- Convey thoughts and ideas to ensure understanding</li> </ul>
Developing Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build team skills and processes</li> </ul>
Preparing Self to Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintain self awareness, employ self understanding, and recognize the impact on others</li> </ul>
Guiding Successful Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make feedback part of the work processes</li> </ul>
Extending Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build trust</li> <li>- Negotiate for understanding, consensus, and to resolve conflict</li> </ul>

Table 1.

The ATLDP report comprehensively covered those core leader competencies needed for all leaders: officers, NCOs and civilians. The study further recognized that the identification and development of interpersonal skills for current and future Army leaders must become a priority for the Army and the other Services. Another study by the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) further distilled these leader competencies into meta-competencies that strategic leaders would need to be effective.

Interpersonal skills and self-awareness were cited as key behaviors for future strategic leaders identified by the SSI in their report entitled *Strategic Leadership Competencies*. The Chief of Staff of the Army tasked the War College in December 2001 to identify the strategic leader skill sets for officers required in the post September 11<sup>th</sup> environment. Researchers

found that self-awareness was related to the personal effectiveness dimension of a leader and identified six meta-competencies – one of which was interpersonal maturity.<sup>48</sup>

In discussing the importance of personal effectiveness, this SSI monograph cites John F. Bolt, a leading researcher on future strategic leadership, who argues that there are three dimensions of a leader – business, leadership, and personal effectiveness.<sup>49</sup> Bolt contends the personal effectiveness dimension is neglected by most leaders because of their perception that work and personal matters must be kept separate. Personal dimension centers on helping to clarify and develop an individual's purpose, vision, values, and talents.<sup>50</sup> This emphasis lends itself to self reflection in the form of self-awareness. Self-awareness is the facility to assess abilities, determine strengths in the environment, and learn how to sustain strengths and correct weaknesses.<sup>51</sup> Leaders must be open to the personal effectiveness dimension as means to become more self aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

So far, this paper has shown that there is a serious link between leader self-awareness and the leader's ability to utilize their interpersonal skills. This link equates to clear and sustained success in building other leaders and stronger teams. The previously cited civilian and military research is consistent in the following conclusions. Leaders continue to lean toward technical and tactical skills while allowing their interpersonal skills to languish. Interpersonal skills are the significant discriminators between good and poor leaders as perceived by subordinates. Finally, self-awareness and interpersonal skills are key behaviors for future strategic leaders in this century. Let's now look at the cause of these interpersonal shortfalls in leaders.

### Common Faults and Causes of Interpersonal Shortfalls

What are the common leader personality faults? Kaplan and DeVries describe three faults in their "Gathering Potential to Derail Checklist".<sup>52</sup> The first fault is those leaders who "move against people". Driven by a need for recognition, these leaders are abrasive, arrogant, and self-promoting. They are often too forceful and have bold visions that may be unrealistic. Sometimes referred to as "toxic leaders", they produce an atmosphere of demotivational behavior. Bullis and Reed in their 2003 report to the Secretary of the Army defined toxic leaders in this way: "... focused on visible short-term mission accomplishment. They provide supervisors with impressive, articulate presentations and enthusiastic responses to missions. But, they are unconcerned about, or oblivious to, staff or troop morale and/or climate."<sup>53</sup> Reed defines the toxic leader syndrome as having three elements: a lack of concern for the welfare of subordinates, an interpersonal technique that bring negativity to the organization and a

conviction by subordinates that they have a self interested leader.<sup>54</sup> The second category is those leaders who “move away from people”. These lenient types fail to assert themselves or tap into the potential of others. They are driven by a need for independence but can be indecisive, insensitive, or even combative. The last category is those leaders who “move toward people” because of their willingness to please others so they can be accepted. They are seldom forceful enough and often too enabling. These managers choose to play it safe rather than challenging the organization to move to new levels. Very dutiful and diligent, but when pushed to the wall, these leaders become martyrs who are intolerant of ambiguity and rigid in their perspectives.

So what is the cause of this shortfall in the use of interpersonal skills by leaders? Many researchers believe it is the typical career path most leaders follow.<sup>55</sup> At the entry level, leaders begin as individual contributors with relatively small groups under their control and a high degree of cooperation to get to know the environment. The brightest performers are motivated to achieve and given promotions whether or not they hold the necessary interpersonal skills. Those who do not delegate, micromanage and enjoy working most of the issues themselves tend to rely less and less on interpersonal aspects of leadership. However, as these leaders move up the organizational ranks, the interpersonal aspect becomes more and more important. This begs the next question: what interpersonal skills are really necessary for strategic leaders to be successful?

#### What Interpersonal Skills Are Key for Strategic Leaders?

Many of the interpersonal skills required of strategic leaders are similar in nature to the ones used earlier in a career. There is one major difference though; strategic leaders must heighten their behavior to an interpersonal maturity that goes beyond face-to-face leadership used earlier in their careers.<sup>56</sup> Since the strategic leader’s environments often exist outside traditional military organizational structures, interpersonal skills are central to success. Dealing with leaders of other services, nongovernmental/ governmental activities and nations require shifting from a power relationship to a personal relationship.

There are several key skills that lead to this interpersonal maturity according the U.S. Army War College SSI report on Strategic Leadership Competencies cited earlier in this paper. Those skills were empowerment, consensus building and negotiation.

Empowerment is the most important as it leads to the sharing of power with subordinates, peers and constituents.<sup>57</sup> Leaders must be willing to involve others and elicit their participation based on the subordinate’s knowledge and skills. Since tasks are complex and information is



widely distributed, leaders can not solve problems on their own.<sup>58</sup> They need to be persuasive, asking others to participate rather than directing actions.<sup>59</sup> Leaders who empower others are good listeners and rely on collaboration rather than authoritative leadership. They are not compelled to do all the talking and resist imposing a solution on others unless the situation warrants.<sup>60</sup> Data collected from 138 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division junior officers in 1999-2000 concluded the most important part of a unit's climate was the empowerment of officers to lead and challenge their soldiers.<sup>61</sup>

Consensus building was uniquely necessary for the interpersonally mature leader. Building interpersonal skills that lead to an agreement among many members of a group that come from different agencies, services and governments is the key to consensus. Institutions outside the military do not always respond to orders or direct leadership as a way to accomplish tasks.

Leaders will find that an understanding of the art of negotiation is important as well. Roger Fisher and William Ury in their book, *Getting to Yes* lay out four-step method to effective negotiation.<sup>62</sup> First, separate the people from the problem. Then, focus on interests, not positions of the people in the group. Third, invent options for mutual gain. Lastly, insist on using an objective criterion that all members can identify. Empowerment, consensus building and negotiation are vital interpersonal skills that leaders would rely on in dealing with other leaders external to the Army culture. The ATLDP study found various interpersonal skills essential for leaders to be effective within their own organizational structures.

Recent research at the Naval Post Graduate School found that there were ten interpersonal skills in descending order of importance to leaders. These skills were taken from the 2003 ATLDP Phase IV Civilian Study Report as representing a cross-section of communication competencies that leaders would typically perform in their positions. The skills in rank order were: (1) providing guidance or direction; (2) motivating and inspiring; (3) fostering commitment; (4) conveying information; (5) mentoring; (6) providing subordinate feedback; (7) teambuilding; (8) listening; (9) persuading; and (10) conflict resolution. For leaders to be effective is important for them to keep these skills in mind and understand their relative importance to the group they are leading.

#### Recommendations to Bring Self-Awareness and Interpersonal Skills to the Forefront

So, where do we go from here? If there is agreement that there is a problem and certain key skills that are necessary to make a difference, we must identify systems to make a

difference. I submit four recommendations that can increase leader self-awareness and exploit interpersonal behaviors to benefit the people of our organizations.

1) Require the 360-Degree Feedback Tool for Commanders and their Senior Non-commissioned officers.

Of all the leader indictments made in this paper, enhancing leader self-awareness would be the first step towards progress. Self-awareness provides an initial foundation allowing the leader a springboard from which to build insights into interpersonal abilities and personality traits. Unfortunately, as cited previous in this paper, most leaders do not make earnest efforts toward self-awareness.

Traditionally, supervisors are seen as very objective but over the course of time this has proven to be untrue.<sup>63</sup> Many studies indicate that leaders are in fact their own blind spots when leading organizations.<sup>64</sup> Shir Bibchik, a health organization researcher, noted that CEO's are unwilling to see themselves as the problem even though everyone else in the organization knows it.<sup>65</sup> She further clarifies that leaders often lack the time to truly look at their own behavior and thus undermine their initiative.<sup>66</sup>

Mandating a 360-degree feedback tool for key Army leaders would begin to heighten self-awareness and open leaders to peer and subordinate assessment. A principal proponent of the 360-degree theory is The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). In their Handbook for Leadership Development, the CCL notes that the 360-degree feedback system provides a comprehensive and useful perspective of a leader's effectiveness – especially in today's larger organizational settings.<sup>67</sup> The CCL concludes that "there is no way to verify the presence or absence of some crucial leader behaviors other than to query the followers."<sup>68</sup> C.T. Chappelow notes that the most remarkable trend in the field of leader development over the past 20 years is the growth of the 360-degree feedback.<sup>69</sup>

For this development tool to be effective, the multi-rater 360-degree feedback tool should be administered to all leaders in key positions throughout the Army in order to foster self-awareness and self development. This tool should begin with leaders at the company level with commanders and first sergeants. The administration process would continue at the battalion and brigade levels for commanders and command sergeant majors. Widening the scope to include senior non-commissioned officers allows for a full feedback experience for both parts of the command team.

In addition to considering commanders for participation in this program, the Army should also include Chiefs of Staff at all headquarters where General Officers are the Commander or

Commandant. The Chief of Staff or equivalent is often a position that tends to formulate and organize staff operations and is likely to have the largest impact on the team.

The first 360-degree feedback would be administered at the six-month so that the subordinates and peers could have adequate time to get to know the leadership and their influence on others. A follow-on 360-degree survey would occur one year later at the 18<sup>th</sup> month mark and allow for the measurement of specific improvements over the initial six-month tool. Senior raters would be responsible to review and counsel the recipients as part of the regular established counseling schedule. Locally trained assessment representatives would be available to sit down with the leader to explain the results and develop a plan for future improvement. The Inspector General's and Equal Opportunity offices are two areas that are involved with command climate issues and could also be expanded to include this task.

LTG (Retired) Frederick Kroesen gives a remarkable testimony to the value and impact of the 360-degree feedback tool.

I recall vividly the experience of one of my subordinate generals in V Corps bringing me his evaluation and dropping it on my desk. I reminded him that this was his evaluation and that he did not have to show it to me. He confirmed that he wanted me to see it. The report was devastating to him. I recall a question in which 30 subordinates were asked, on a scale of 1 to 5, if they would emulate their leader's personal and professional conduct. All 30 responded with 1s, "absolutely not." I asked him what he was going to do about it. He told me that he had called the subordinates and staff together and thanked them for their honesty, and indicated to them that he was going to try to change his behavior. He said that he had come to ask me to give him another survey in six months. The results of the second survey revealed dramatic improvement. The counseling the general got from those under him was far more effective in modifying his behavior than any he could have received from me. Later, his wife confided in me privately that he was also a better husband.<sup>70</sup>

While there is some criticism to the effectiveness of the 360-degree feedback tool, corporations are using it with growing consistency and the Army is turning to this tool for its senior leaders. For many years now, the CCL requires that all brigadier generals and civilian equivalents complete a 360-degree feedback tool prior to attendance of their course. In a similar fashion since 2004, the U.S. Army War College encourages all students to participate in a 360-degree leadership assessment portfolio. A skilled professional from the college's Army Physical Fitness Research Institute reviews the comparisons from subordinates, peers and supervisors with the student in a two-hour assessment session. Research on how to effectively implement the 360-degree feedback tool noted five recommendations: 1) in addition to the assessment there needs to be a development plan and follow-up activities, 2) boss support and recipient buy-in are critical in order to develop specific developmental goals, 3) start with the

senior leaders and cascade downward, 4) poor administration of the feedback will make the process fatal, 5) timing of the tool is essential to maximize the impact.<sup>71</sup>

A vehicle to increase self-awareness is not enough. Without a specific doctrinal perspective, teaching the application of how your self-awareness and interpersonal skills can complement the group members will be lost to our current style of leadership development which is widely relegated to reading manuals or searching for leader role-models.

2) Establish an educational and training system for leaders in the techniques of understanding, assessing and exploiting the effectiveness of individuals and groups

To enhance understanding and reinforce the relevance of leader self-awareness and formidable interpersonal skills, a doctrine basis should be accepted leading to a program of instruction. This doctrine would form the basis to institutionalize change by documenting self awareness/interpersonal skill implementation in Army leader and team development. Besides prescribing the introduction of these interpersonal skills into the Army educational system, this doctrine would detail specific methods for leaders to use in their environment and explain the significance of self-awareness /interpersonal skill implementation.

A strong model for self-awareness/ interpersonal skills implementation education and training already exists and is found within the program of instruction for Organizational Leadership for Executives (OLE) course. Designed in 1986 to the answer a leadership deficit amongst senior Department of the Army civilians, OLE looked beyond daily tasks to assessing and interpreting the external environment, the organization, the leadership process, the need for subordinate development, and the continuing need for continuing self-development.

Facilitated by the Civilian Leadership Training Division of the Center for Army Leadership, OLE introduced participants to a 14-day experience covering a range of topics: developing strategies for organizational excellence, influencing subordinate performance, managing innovation and change, diagnosing systemic problems, and building excellence into the leadership team.

The primary method of delivery for the OLE experience is the experiential learning methodology because of its powerful impact on participants. Adopted from J.A. Olmstead's Small Group Instruction: Theory and Practice, this methodology maintained that if behavior change is desired, then the learner can best acquire new behaviors by trying them in realistic situations that match the daily work setting.<sup>72</sup> Facilitators provided situations to the participants giving them the opportunity to experience, observe, practice, and obtain feedback about actual behaviors.<sup>73</sup>

The experiential learning method is a stark contrast to current Army training in leadership skills which tends to be too theoretical and non-behavioral. Our current training and what little education exists in leadership skills leaves leaders to draw more on their own opinions or personal experience when confronting leadership problems. Although the last OLE course ended in 2006 because of civilian training restructuring, twenty years of refinement make it a comprehensive foundational experience for enhancing leader self-awareness and interpersonal skills to build future leaders and teams.

The intent of the OLE experience was not about providing solutions to specific leadership problems. Instead, participants practice and acquire a variety of additional behavior skills which enabled them to handle and solve any leadership problem in a systematic and effective way. Given the increasing nature that leaders are not relying on their self-awareness and interpersonal skills as it relates to building leaders and teams, the OLE experience is a model whose time has come to do for military leaders what it did for civilian leaders over the past two decades.

Two senior Army leaders reinforce the significance of the OLE experience and what it can do for today's leaders and organizations. Lieutenant General Michael D. Rochelle, Deputy Chief of Staff G-1 of the United States Army remembers using the OLE techniques as early as his company command.<sup>74</sup> The teambuilding aspect of the OLE experience helped him and his leaders shed their bias. He personally witnessed members of his group move from an individualistic perspective to a common understanding when it came to tackling problems and initiatives. Ms. Toni B. Wainwright, a SES-2, was appointed as Deputy Director of Civilian Personnel, Department of the Army in February 2005. She observes that "we have to change the institutional culture to not only be accepting of individuals participating in this kind of self-awareness and leader development training but that it is shown to be a priority".<sup>75</sup> Another point she stresses is that much research shows leader development doesn't work well without the interaction and presence of a group.

### 3) Translate doctrine to Army educational requirements.

Doctrine should drive a strategy of educational requirements. Armed with strong leader self-awareness and interpersonal skill doctrine, the next step is to implement this doctrine using the experiential learning methodology into the Army educational system. Education will model the appropriate self-awareness and interpersonal behaviors needed as leaders enter their future teams. An opportune time to introduce this educational experience is on the first day of a course during the formation of a new group. When all students gather together in their new

environment and meet for the first time, they begin the stages of group development. This time is a fruitful proving ground for self-awareness and interpersonal exploration.

During the first two days together, a trained facilitator will lead the attendees through a group development phase. The first few hours would set the tone for the experience and the participants. Perhaps, a beginning ice breaker activity would allow the individual and the group to make an assessment on a fictitious scenario. This scenario exposes through what lens a leader views new circumstances and those assumptions are made in the absence of looking critically at facts and behaviors. From there, the group would move to what they really want to achieve as part of the course. This is a time for the sharing of candid perspectives rather than expected niceties. Next, all would have the opportunity to participate in introductions. This phase goes beyond your name and rudimentary background information to hard hitting, probing questions that were likely never asked before. Introductions scrape off the mask or facade that most wear when they enter a new group setting.

The intent of this educational experience (referred to as IIE for interpersonal integrative experience for the purposes of this paper) is all about relationships and getting at the three interpersonal desires as described by William C. Schutz: inclusion, control and openness.<sup>76</sup> While there are five other popular models of group development, the IIE experience uses the Schultz model because it fully addresses the human dimension.<sup>77</sup> Upon arrival, all members of a group satisfy their inclusion desires: wanting to know what the organization is; where they fit in; if they will be accepted by others; what are their roles and boundaries and how these compare to others; what are their limits; and who will they associate. Once the inclusion needs are met, people move to their control desires. Moving from the inclusion to the control dimension requires risk. Members of the group observe who the emerging leaders will be; test the system to determine their ability to influence others; ascertain their level of responsibility; and discover if others value their input. They want to know where they fit into the pecking order and how much freedom they will have. The last stage of interpersonal desire is openness and usually requires more risk and conflict to make this move. Individuals examine the interpersonal issues and decide whether they want to foster trust and closeness in the group and with whom. This educational experience allow for issues and behaviors to be acted out. Leaders who recognize these dynamics will have a better understanding of subordinates and be better prepared to provide leadership behaviors that encourage trust, closeness, and openness.<sup>78</sup>

All major schools in both officer and non-commissioned officer education system should adopt this two-day IIE experience. For officers, schools would include: the basic officer leadership course (specifically in the pre-commissioning and basic leader phases), captains

career course (CCC), intermediate level education (ILE) and the U.S. Army War College. For non-commissioned officers, this education would begin with their first leadership course, warriors leaders course (WLC) and continue through to basic and advanced non-commissioned officer courses (BNCOC/ ANCOC) culminating with the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Course. Resources at the Center for Army Leadership could be used to centralize training of school facilitators to ensure standardization and understanding.

#### 4) Introduction of a Command Team Transition (CTT) – applying theory to practice.

To assist commanders in the transition to their future units, implementing a three-day command team transition during the pre-command course (PCC) would provide a self-awareness/ interpersonal behavior reinforcement to strengthen the unit. This transition experience is a way to bring members on board and assists the new Commander by increasing awareness of the issues that face the organization. Much the same as the leader educational experience outlined above, this transition should take place immediately following the change of command. A trained facilitator would administer this experience to include interviews with the key leadership (participants) in advance of the transition. More importantly, this experience models the IIE percepts in a command transition setting.

Several goals and objectives set the framework of the CTT. Four goals drive the leadership experience: team building, key leader transition and reflection, self-awareness, and leadership commitment. Six main objectives are tied to developing leaders who: experience increase self-awareness, communicate influentially, develop a thinking perspective to recognize paradigms and move to creative thinking, diagnose their own leader effectiveness, understand and build teams, and develop a corporate approach to solving problems.

Why even consider a facilitated transition experience? The fundamental reason is that this transition gives the commander insights as to the state of the climate and those issues that exist within the command and external environment that have a formidable affect to the organization. Most commanders hit the ground running and jump into the tempo rich environment without getting their bearings on culture, people, and external factors that can hinder mission accomplishment. Primarily, this experience reduces the anxiety and turbulence that accompanies most conversions of the top leadership of an organization. Managing change is a continual challenge for all organizations especially during a leadership transition. People know their leaders and leaders who understanding their leadership will be able to adapt and anticipate events that are going to occur react more efficiently.

Experiential modules during the pre-command course (PCC) would set the framework for this transition. Future commanders could become familiar with the process and have an opportunity to ask questions and explore methods in advance of their transition. Leaders adopting this experience will learn more about themselves and their subordinates in 72-hours than they could after six-months in the organization. Spouses could also benefit from a two-day experience at the PCC to introduce them to the self-awareness and interpersonal behaviors that are in any given organization. This knowledge would translate well as spouse support their family readiness groups and external organizations within their future communities.

### Conclusion

Sun Tzu wrote over 2500 years ago: “Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look on them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death.”<sup>79</sup> This early theorist of war testifies to an overlooked truth even today. The ability of leaders to understand and utilize their interpersonal skills is nothing new and has a profound impact today.

My main reason for choosing this topic was because of my interest on the positive effects of self-awareness and interpersonal behaviors on leading others. After attending the OLE course prior to battalion commander, I was convinced that I had not paid much attention to my self-awareness and how it impacted those I led. As I approached my change of command, I arranged a CTT during the first three days of my command – much to the opposition of fellow commanders and mentors. Truly, the CTT experience exposed aspects of my battalion team that would have taken me many months to clearly see. Even members of the team were moved to be more self-aware and saw interpersonal aspects that translated into openness, trust and understanding.

Researching this paper supported my impression that most leaders do not fully utilize self-awareness and interpersonal behaviors to build other leaders and their teams. Studies on both the corporate and military side continue to observe that interpersonal skills are overlooked for technical and tactical ones. Listening to my U.S. Army War College seminar colleagues consistently reflected on their frustrations with senior leaders who berate and intimidate translated this research into matching vignettes. My colleagues likely did not see these interpersonal frustrations since these were often verbally fogged by criticism over existing systems and processes. This interpersonal frustration cuts to the real meaning – will we do anything to notice these leader self-awareness and interpersonal issues?



Today's environment of communicating and leading across many interservice, interagency and multinational cultures will continue to become the norm. If leaders sacrifice self-awareness and interpersonal behaviors now and it is a barrier to success, then we should move to improve our processes to assist leaders to become more proficient and confident in these skills.

## Endnotes

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