

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**Self-Awareness: A Strategic Leader Competency**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Discussion of transformation has consumed the Army recently. Transformation involves every member of the United States Army and it will take every person in the Army to contribute to reach the Objective Force. However, transformation is not about equipment; it is about the institution. The Army has developed a transformation campaign plan that will integrate evolving doctrine, new equipment and update training regimes. The Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) established a panel to look specifically at the how the Army trains leaders and what imperatives the leader would require in the future. The purpose of this paper is to discuss one of those imperatives: self-awareness as a strategic leader competency. In order to outline the importance of self-awareness as a strategic leader competency, understanding the environment and the challenges that might face the leader in the future is a prerequisite. This paper will define self-awareness; describe techniques to develop self-awareness, and describe potential pitfalls. This paper will conclude with some recommendations for developing greater self-awareness in strategic leaders.



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## PREFACE

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## Self-Awareness: A Strategic Leader Competency

“Leadership is the most important thing we do in peacetime. Everyday, we train soldiers and grow them into leaders.”

—General Eric K. Shinseki  
CSA

### **PURPOSE.**

Discussion of transformation has consumed the Army recently. Transformation involves every member of the United States Army and it will take every person in the Army to contribute to reach the Objective Force. However, transformation is not about equipment; it is about the institution. The Army has developed a transformation campaign plan that will integrate evolving doctrine, new equipment and update training regimes. The Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) established a panel to look specifically at the how the Army trains leaders and what imperatives the leader would require in the future. The purpose of this paper is to discuss one of those imperatives: self-awareness as a strategic leader competency. In order to outline the importance of self-awareness as a strategic leader competency, understanding the environment and the challenges that might face the leader in the future is a prerequisite. This paper will define self-awareness, describe techniques to develop self-awareness, and discuss indicators of potential pitfalls. This paper will conclude with some recommendations for developing greater self-awareness in strategic leaders.

### **BACKGROUND.**

A key stage of growing as a person is self-awareness, meaning the person understands the basic “self” who thinks and feels. Increased self-awareness helps individuals discover what positive aspects they have which allow them to get along with others, as well as the barriers that may impede interpersonal relationships. They discover how something they do impacts on others and then have the option to adjust their behavior or not. The ability to see yourself as others see you sets the stage for improved interpersonal relationships.<sup>1</sup>

The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study released a report that determined, because of the level of uncertainty in the contemporary operating environment, future leaders need to possess the “enduring competencies” of self-awareness and adaptability. The panel determined that self-awareness and adaptability are the Army's enduring strategy based competencies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> The study defined self-awareness as understanding how to assess abilities, knowing strengths and weaknesses in the operational environment, and

learning how to correct these weaknesses. Adaptability is recognizing changes in the environment, assessing those changes, and applying the lessons learned. Adaptable leaders can manage multiple tasks without losing focus or energy. Such adaptable leaders are flexible to new challenges, fluid in adjusting to change, and limber in their thinking in the face of new data and realities.<sup>3</sup> The Army Training and Leader Development report highlights that “self-awareness and adaptability are symbiotic”. Leaders who are self-aware, but not adaptable, are destined to fail because they cannot or refuse to change their behavior. Adaptable leaders who are not self-aware are just as apt to fail because they will continue to change just for the sake of change. Self-awareness and adaptability are so interrelated that the Panel called these competencies “metacompetencies”. The panel determined that self-awareness and adaptability are the basis for lifelong learning and are required for success in full spectrum operations of the future.<sup>4</sup>

### **CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF SELF-AWARENESS**

In his book, Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman provides an example of self-awareness in telling an old Japanese story of a samurai who challenges a Zen master to explain the differences between heaven and hell. The Zen master replied that the samurai had no clue and the master had no time for him or anyone like him. The master explained that he did not intend to waste his time or energy on this “lout”. The samurai was very displeased and quickly drew his sword in a state of total rage, screaming, “I could kill you for your impertinence.” At this point the master calmly looks at his protégé and said, “That is hell.” Startled and realizing his master was speaking with great wisdom the samurai sheathed his weapon, bowed and thank his mentor for his insight. The monk then replied, “That is heaven.” The transformation of the samurai from his state of rage to becoming aware that the rage was controlling him is the foundation of self-awareness.<sup>5</sup>

A working definition of self-awareness is to know one’s strengths and weaknesses. Goleman and his colleagues further develop this definition as:

having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, as well as one’s strengths and limitations and one’s values and motives. People with strong self-awareness are realistic---neither overly self-critical nor naively hopeful. They are honest with themselves about themselves. They are honest about themselves with others, even to the point of being able to laugh at their own foibles.<sup>6</sup>

A leader must have good self-awareness. This can be as simple as having a clear understanding of what a leader does well and what he or she does not do well.<sup>7</sup> Leaders must recognize their personal strengths and weaknesses.<sup>8</sup> According to former CMSgt of the Air Force Robert Gaylor, “You can and will be an effective leader if you identify your strengths, capitalize on them, and consciously strive to reduce and minimize the times you apply your style inappropriately.” Self-awareness is not new: businesses having been studying and training self-awareness to their managers for many years. The Wharton Business School reports that leaders need to be self-assured, and those who are, are a source of motivation for others in the organization. “The ability to observe one’s own behavior, to be aware of one’s own actions, and to appreciate one’s own thoughts, feelings and emotions, is now understood to be essential as a foundation for exceptional leadership.”<sup>9</sup>

An important part of leadership is the ability to see and understand the frameworks that define leadership and teamwork styles. Once aware of the working styles inside of an organization, a leader is better prepared to assess, assimilate, and accommodate the different styles which best enhance his or her own style of leadership. Becoming self-aware is learning about you and teaching yourself. As a leader develops self-awareness, he is also developing “others awareness” and this will lead to better methods of leading and working in the future.<sup>10</sup> Adapting one’s leadership style to the mission at hand is an indication of a self-aware leader.

Key tasks for a leader include generating excitement, optimism, passion, and creating an environment of cooperation and trust.<sup>11</sup> Daniel Goleman and his colleagues highlight that self-awareness is the foundation for emotional intelligence and that everything builds up from one’s self-awareness. Their research shows that a leader cannot manage his or her emotions if he or she is unaware of those emotions. In addition, if leaders are unable to control their emotions then their interpersonal relationships will suffer as well. “Self-awareness facilitates both empathy and self-management, and these two, in combination, allow effective relationship management.”<sup>12</sup> Goleman continues to develop his thesis by pointing out that the business world often overlooks self-awareness even though he considers it the foundation for emotional leadership. He writes that without knowing one’s own emotions, one cannot manage them and is then less likely to understand the emotions in others. Leaders who are self-aware or assured are linked to their inner feelings. They know what affects them positively and negatively and how their emotions affect their job performance. “Instead of letting anger build into an outburst, they spot it as it crescendos and can see both what’s causing it and how to do something constructive about it.” Leaders who are not self-aware are not able to control these outbursts.

They cannot see these outbursts coming and therefore lose control of their temper and have no idea why their emotions are pushing them around.<sup>13</sup>

Becoming a better leader or an authentic leader requires honesty with one's own strengths and weaknesses. According to Robert Lee and Sara King, authors of Discovering the Leader in You, "there is no such thing as "one-size-fits all" leadership, the most outstanding leaders are also authentic leaders. Your leadership abilities flow from who you are as a person: your values, talents, personality, and self-image. Being authentic is about leading in a way that is natural for you and not trying to be someone else."<sup>14</sup> An authentic leader is more like a natural leader. You do not have to pretend to be something or someone that you are not. The better your self-awareness, the more adaptive you will be which leads to more effective decisions. Lee and King highlight the following benefits of self-awareness. Self-awareness means you will be more effective in working with others. You will know how your behavior influences others, either positively or negatively. You have the potential to become a better negotiator because of your ability to judge how others react to your actions and gauge the differences among the people. Self-awareness adds to your flexibility. You gain "interpersonal agility" and learn how best to contribute to your organization. Finally, because of your self-awareness and values you determine the course that allows you to achieve the goals that you have set for your organization.<sup>15</sup>

Effective leaders know the direction that they want to move their organization. They have a clear vision that is matching with their values and their dreams. They know why they are moving in the direction they are going. It is clear to them what is best for the organization. They have a "gut instinct" or know that it "feels right" to them. Goleman offers an example of a person who turns down a job which offered increased financial benefits because the new job was not in keeping with his long-term goals. A less self-aware person might have taken the money at the sacrifice of their values. Years later the less self-aware person would complain that he had not been challenged in the new job and had grown bored wishing he had stayed on with his old job.<sup>16</sup>

In his book Principle-Centered Leadership, Stephen Covey revisits the seven habits of highly effective people. In the book he proclaims self-awareness as the unique human capability or endowment associated with the first habit: to be proactive. He describes self-awareness as an ability to choose one's response. On the low end of the spectrum is the ineffective leader who transfers responsibility. The responsibility can be transferred to a person, event, or to the environment as long as it is not them. By transferring the blame the ineffective

leader has in effect relinquished his power. The poor leader can justify in his mind that he is not the problem because he is not in control; therefore how could he be the problem?<sup>17</sup>

At the other end of the continuum is self-awareness and moving toward organizational effectiveness. In this case the leader knows his tendencies, his emotions and his actions. The leader knows that they are the creative force in their lives. How he chooses to respond or not respond is within his control. There is a level of freedom between when something happens and when someone finally responds. This response can be either to a person or to a situation. The more someone exercises this zone of freedom the larger the zone or area becomes creating even more flexibility. Covey postulates that the more one works in this area of freedom gradually he will stop being the instant reactor or the person who immediately becomes extremely angry. Eventually he will become a cool respondent. His actions are not tied to his upbringing, genetic make-up or experiences, but instead he has become the responsible chooser.<sup>18</sup>

An example of a leader who knew his tendencies, his emotions and his actions was Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi. David Maraniss describes the vision of Vince Lombardi in the book When Pride Still Mattered, explaining that Lombardi knew the direction he wanted to take his new team the Green Bay Packers. He understood that for him to succeed he was going to have imbalance in his life or what he referred to as his "Trinity of Life": God, his family and his football team. For him to be the best coach and for his team to reach the pinnacle of the football world he would have to do two things. First, he would have to sacrifice his family and the time he spent with them and second, he would have to use his temper and impatience to manipulate his football team. Both of these characteristics were ones that Lombardi regretted never being able to fully control. At the same time Lombardi feared that if he did control his emotions that he would not have been as effective of a coach. He balanced his life between the need to succeed and the need to be good through his daily prayers.<sup>19</sup>

Leaders attuned to their inner signals, recognizing how their feelings affect them and their job performance has a high level of emotional self-awareness.<sup>20</sup> Self-awareness implies that you are aware of your moods as they are happening, just as Coach Lombardi. He knew that his temper and impatience were beyond his ability to fully control, but he was willing to accept this level of passion. He felt that by controlling this intense desire to win that he would have caused more harm than good. He was not willing to sacrifice what he deemed were the necessary skills to be an effective football coach. People with this degree of self-awareness have a perspective of their emotional lives. "The intelligent use of emotions: you intentionally make your emotions work for you using them to help guide your behavior and thinking in ways that enhance your

results”.<sup>21</sup> Goleman explains that, “clarity about emotions may undergird other personality traits: they are autonomous and sure of their own boundaries, are in good psychological health, and tend to have a positive outlook on life. When they get into a bad mood, they do not ruminate and obsess about it, and are able to get out of it sooner. In short, their mindfulness helps them manage their emotions.”<sup>22</sup>

Self-awareness is not a new concept. Self-awareness allows the leader to become cognizant of their strengths and weaknesses and enables him to use that knowledge to its fullest advantage. Self-awareness is being aware of the emotions that make up the person. An effective leader can assess their abilities and make adjustments based on the needs of the organization. The ability to learn and make adjustments based on the requirements is a signal of a self-aware leader.

Now that I have established the importance of and what self-awareness is, the next sections will discuss the different techniques available to improve self-awareness. It is not only important to be self aware, but also to know how to increase self-awareness. It is essential to remember that everyone is unique and will react differently to the methods. The leader needs to know that there are different techniques available and he should use the one that is best suited for him.

## **TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE SELF-AWARENESS.**

### **FEEDBACK AS A TOOL.**

Everyone enters into the self-awareness process differently and has a level of personal understanding of their strengths and weaknesses based on assessments or reflection. Some people have participated in comprehensive programs that include formal feedback assessments or evaluations, work appraisals, or 360-degree feedbacks.<sup>23</sup> This includes using integrated feedback from employees, peers, and managers throughout the program.

A key to changing attitudes, values and behavior is feedback. Feedback is information that allows a person to develop better self-awareness.<sup>24</sup> A true leader is ready to improve and welcomes feedback as an opportunity to learn. He has a baseline for skill development and have the chance to discover his shortcomings, seek feedback, and continue to learn.<sup>25</sup> Feedback is required for people who want to have honest relationships and it is the connection between people’s behavior and the world around them.

Feedback on individual performance is one of the primary means used by organizations to influence individual and group behavior. Feedback is a way to let others know how effective they are or how they affect others in the organization. It provides a way for people to learn how they affect the world around them, and it helps them to grow and become more effective. Feedback is a tool that organizational leaders use to shape subordinate member behavior in directions that are consistent with the accomplishment of organizational goals. Feedback is a valuable resource for individuals throughout their tenure in an organization.<sup>26</sup> If we know how people see us, we can overcome issues or problems in how we communicate and improve how we interact with others.

Feedback can come from several sources, but the most common sources are the self, the organization, and others. Although all of these sources of information have value for the leader, not all of these sources value is equal. Some feedback has more value to the leader than others do.<sup>27</sup> It is for the individual to determine which source has the greatest feedback value, but getting wide varieties of feedback tends to provide a more complete picture of the leader. Moreover, with further information the leader is able to better identify strengths and fill in gaps.

The leader who wants to improve his abilities should start by getting as many different perspectives to allow for a more complete picture. The 360-degree method is a tool that offers that fuller picture. Gathering information from bosses, peers, subordinates, as well as themselves, the leader benefits from multiple perspectives about how they act and how others see their actions. The 360-degree method is useful because it gives a more complete image. Because you act different when you are with different people and in different environments---be that your boss, your family, or your employees. This is why so many different people can see the same person in a completely different light.<sup>28</sup>

Feedback from self is another source of information on behavior and performance. Self-assessments and self-reflection are important skills of strategic leaders. However, self-assessments and reflection can be misleading due to learned mechanisms called biases that protect self-esteem.<sup>29</sup> Some people use the biases to protect their self-esteem because they see the feedback as pure criticism and do not want to hear it.

Instead of treating feedback with disdain leaders should view it as a gift. In addition, leaders should thank those who provided the feedback. Asking for feedback and ways to improve can be scary and intimidating. However, the results can be valuable and pleasantly surprising. Leaders need feedback to see how others perceive their actions and how their



actions affect others. After all, credibility is in the eye of the beholder. It is only when we see how others see us that can we really improve.<sup>30</sup>

Feedback can only make a leader better. Understanding or becoming more aware of his abilities from another person's viewpoint adds to a leader's self-awareness. Granted some of the feedback varies in worth to the person receiving it, but it is how the leader incorporates the feedback into their lives that matters. The effective leader can glean the most beneficial portions from the feedback and put that into practice.

#### REFLECTION AS A TOOL.

Reflection is another technique to advance one's self-awareness. Marilyn Wood Daudelin writes, "Reflection is a natural and familiar process. In school, we wrote papers, answered questions, engaged in classroom discussions, and analyzed cases to develop new insights." She also points out that reflection can be an informal process as well. A person can experience reflection while jogging, driving their car or mowing the lawn.<sup>31</sup> Reflection is at least in some measure conscious, but it does not need to occur in the form or medium of words.<sup>32</sup>

For reflection to work it has to be a priority. Leaders must allocate time to spend reflecting if they want to grow. However, in an action packed world there is little time dedicated for pause or reflection. Leaders and subordinates focus on short-term objectives. Superiors do not see taking time to reflect on one's experiences or self-awareness as being productive. Daudelin cites Henry Mintzberg who wrote over twenty years ago in the Harvard Business Review, "Study after study have shown that managers work at an unrelenting pace; that their activities are characterized by brevity, variety, and discontinuity; and that they are strongly oriented to action and dislike reflective activities."<sup>33</sup>

Reflection on self-awareness is a private and a personal experience. It gives you the chance to pause, to think about past events and to learn through these experiences. A person taking an event, bringing the experience into their brain, evaluating the experience, making linkages to the other lessons in the past, and filtering through any personal biases, accomplishes reflection. An outside source usually initiates reflection and maybe stimulated by listening, asking questions, or providing advice, but the process of reflection is an internal occurrence.<sup>34</sup>

John Robbins is an author, founder of EarthSave International and chairman of Youth for Environmental Sanity (YES) as well as a board member for other nonprofit organizations. He is also the son and nephew of the founders of Baskin-Robbins and was the heir apparent to the

boardroom until he began to question the company's philosophies. He found the company's philosophies did not match what he felt was important and so he separated himself with the company totally. When asked about his thoughts on reflection Robbins responded with:

I think people in this society need a spiritual practice. In order to find your voice and find the song that's within your heart and sing it with your life, you need some daily thing that you do regularly, whether you feel like it or not, that's nurturing your soul, a time of prayer, a time of contemplation. Some people do yoga and meditate, other people go run out in the woods or dance or pray or keep a journal. There are so many ways. And it can be one thing for a few years and another thing for another few years; it can change form. The form isn't the point. Individuals have to find what works for them, but some way were you're answerable, not to society and not to making a living and not to other people's needs, but just to what's alive in you.<sup>35</sup>

According to Daudelin the reflecting can be broken into four stages. First is determining the situation. Many times this can be the most difficult step. The leader must ask what they are trying to accomplish. It could be something that is causing them angst or something that they want to know more about. The second step is the analysis of the situation. Analysis of the situation entails searching for the material that answers the questions about what they are working on. It includes searching through past events and behaviors to find similar situations. The third stage is when they develop a hypothesis that answers the question. Developing the hypothesis is the initial stage of formulation and testing of a tentative theory. Stage four is action. Action brings closure to the cycle and the final test of the hypothesis. This is the time when learning occurs. Learning is creating meaning from previous experiences that guides future activities. Therefore, until the leader completes stage four and brings the cycle to closure there has been no learning.<sup>36</sup>

According to Donald Schon, we do things everyday without thinking about it so much that the action becomes automatic. We perform this action in a smooth sequence of events, activity, recognition, decision, and adjustment. This "knowing in action" is how we get through the day. Then out of nowhere something different happens. The familiar routine is not the same and produces a new result. These events produce a surprise, either pleasant or unpleasant. We can respond to the surprise by either ignoring the signs that produce it or by reflecting on the action.<sup>37</sup>

Schon postulates that there are two ways to reflect on the action. Either you think back to the way things have been done in the past to discover how "knowing in action" set up the surprising outcome. The other way is to stop and think about the action. During "stop and think" a pause is taken to evaluate the action either during or after the event. In both cases the reflection has no immediate association with the present action. The alternative method is to

reflect during the action without interrupting it. In this case the person can adjust to the situation at hand. The person's thinking can serve to adapt to what is going on while it is happening. In this case, Schon calls this "reflection in action."<sup>38</sup>

Journal writing is another means for reflection. Journal writing forces the leader to take time to put thoughts on paper. Leaders can then see and read their thoughts. This gives form to and substance to inner thoughts. If you take journal writing seriously, it will become important enough to set time aside to write. Periodically writing allows the opportunity to become more reflective, and ensures you take some time to process how you feel.<sup>39</sup>

The journal can be an effective tool for self-expression, it fosters internal growth, and it can be a valued companion on the road to self-discovery. A journal provides for a space to express innermost thoughts, concerns, feelings, ideas, questions, and later provide a place to return and revisit the notes. Journals also allow people to get in touch with hidden or below the surface parts of themselves.<sup>40</sup>

Reflection remains very personal. It offers a chance for the leader to evaluate what is happening around in a private atmosphere. Reflection requires no special training or equipment. It requires only the time to stop and think about past events and then applying the lessons learned to future opportunities. The secret to reflection is setting the time aside to do it. Reflection can only succeed if it becomes a priority in the leader's life.

## **THE BLINDSIDE OF SELF-AWARENESS**

Up to this point, I have discussed techniques that are useful to develop self-awareness in leaders, a competency heralded as necessary for effective 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership.

Unfortunately, there are things that cause people in leadership positions to fail. These "derailers" interrupt or block a person's opportunity to achieve success. In many cases these pitfalls can spell trouble for not only the leader but for his or her organization as well. Derailers can include abusive behavior towards subordinates, being concerned about promotions or performance ratings, pushing too hard or burning oneself out, being power hungry, looking for status symbols, lacking integrity, lacking self-confidence, micro-managing or not delegating enough responsibility, being close-minded, or pushing subordinates too hard. Mary Tucker uses the examples below of people not aware of personal weaknesses that eventually cost them their jobs.

"Dick", a former head of Simon and Schuster, was unable to stop abusing his subordinates. Simon and Schuster continued to prosper under his leadership financially, but

eventually his boss fired him for not being a team player. When asked by the media if he would have fired Dick if had been able to bring in twice the business, Frank Bioni, Viacom's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) coldly replied, "Probably".<sup>41</sup>

"Jane" proved quite intelligent. She had the ability to analyze financial data better than her peers did. Her immediate supervisor knew this and selected her to analyze an organization that he hoped to purchase. Jane carefully analyzed the books, making a recommendation to purchase the business. Her boss subsequently visited the business and he was shocked to find the company in total disarray. Jane had totally missed the signs of a CEO who was out of control and facing burnout. Jane is no longer part of this company.<sup>42</sup>

Dick and Jane are examples of talented fast trackers that do not understand emotional intelligence. They are not aware that the things that caused them to have success in the past are the same skills that could backfire and knock them off the road to success. "What happens is that people rely too heavily on the skills that contributed to their early success. As a result, they fail to develop new skills. When the going gets tough, they revert to the same old tactics--- and then wonder why those tactics don't work."<sup>43</sup> These people fail to see a need for personal change because they are not self-aware.

According to Michael Kaplan, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) surveyed 62 executives trying to identify reasons for people not reaching their peak. The first reason is the inability or failure to adapt to change. People are either persistent in performing the same way as they have in the past or they do not have the talent to adjust. They prove to be inflexible or rigid. Another reason for failure is being difficult to work with. Others see these people as insensitive, manipulative, and non-supporting. The final reason according to the CCL study is failing to lead in a "team-centered" way. Demonstrating initiative and being aggressive are ways to separate from the pack early in one's career. However, these same skills may not prove to achieve the same results at the executive level and may isolate the leader instead of creating a team.<sup>44</sup>

Morgan W. McCall, Jr. and Michael M. Lombardo, found the differences between the leaders who went all the way to the top and those who fell short of their goals was those who did not meet their goals had one or more of these flaws that derailed them.

- Insensitivity to others: abrasive, intimidating, bullying style.
- Cold, aloof, arrogant.
- Betrayal of trust.
- Overly ambitious: thinking of next job, playing politics.
- Specific performance problems with organization.

- Overmanaging -- unable to delegate.
- Unable to staff effectively.
- Unable to think strategically.
- Unable to adapt to boss with different style.
- Overdependent on advocates or mentors.<sup>45</sup>

The inability to learn from mistakes is a major cause for “fatal flaws” as a leader advances in an organization. Research is clear that learning from mistakes, your own or others, is a very productive self-development tool. Typical negative experiences could be a tyrant boss or receiving tough feedback from subordinates. Other bad experiences come from leaders who are insensitive and try to coerce others through intimidation. Leaders who are cold or distant have a difficult time reaching out to others and can appear to be unwilling to learn. These typical flaws keep people from reaching their fullest potential. The person willing to learn these lessons can be a powerful developmental tool. A positive attitude toward mistakes and negative experiences is crucial to growth and improved performance.<sup>46</sup> Self-aware leaders see these weaknesses either in themselves or in others and try to eliminate them from their leader style.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To develop the self-aware leader the Army must commit to being a learning organization that institutionalizes the organization’s learning philosophy and provides the resources necessary to foster continuous education, training, and leader development. The Army leader must commit to lifelong learning, takes responsibility for their own self-development, and not relies on others. All leaders must continually assess their own capabilities.<sup>47</sup> The commander is the linkage between the organization and the leader to ensure that there is a climate to support continuous learning.

The United States Army War College (AWC) mission is to develop strategic leaders for the future. Leadership means self-discovery, getting a better yield out of given attributes.<sup>48</sup> A portion of the curriculum at AWC is dealing with the challenges and the required traits of the strategic leader.

The Army War College uses myriad tools to help make the students more aware but the college stops short of inculcating self-awareness into the student. Tools like the Myers-Briggs test, the individual learning plans, the course elective process, and the leader development and

assessment package are a good start. By adding selective readings, reflective exercises, and personal journals, every student could leave AWC a more self-aware and a better leader.

I recommend the college expand the strategic leadership readings to include articles discussing self-awareness and its importance as a strategic leader competency. I would start with including portions of the Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) Officer study report to the Army. This report reflects many current concerns of officers in the field that strategic leaders need to know. The report highlights that in a contemporary operating environment leaders need to develop their self-awareness and adaptability skills. This report does offer a limited definition of self-awareness but to gain a better understanding of the skill, I would include some articles from the business and education community as well. For example, from the journal Human Resource Planning, there is an article by Marcus Buckingham and Richard Vosburgh entitled "The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Human Resources Function: It's the talent, stupid!" In this article the authors write how the human resource office responsibilities have evolved over the years. They highlight how organizations have tried to incorporate human resource management systems to improve human resource functions in the corporations. It has an interesting discussion on different managers and their behaviors, competencies, and traits. There are other periodicals, articles, and books that offer additional information on self-awareness that would lead to meaningful discussion in the seminar during the strategic leadership lessons.

The faculty instructor could then focus the discussion on how to develop strategic leadership competencies and skills, such as self-awareness and adaptability. Complimentary readings are available from the Army's leadership manuals or the many sources from the business and education worlds. Structuring the reading to coincide with the guest lecturers, for example Francis Hesselbein gives a chance for the student to broaden his or her vision of strategic leadership and enhances the interaction between the participants. The students are better prepared to reflect on the message the lecturer is delivering.

Reflective exercises give the students the chance to think about strengths and weaknesses. Toward the end of the week, students should reflect on the lessons of the past week and determine what they learned about themselves during the week. This need not nor should not focus solely on the war college. The student should reflect on how they reacted throughout the week with peers, subordinates, family, and others to determine what they can learn about themselves. It is clear that they are going to be learning the material that is part of the curriculum, but the focus now is what they learned about themselves over the week. For

many of the students this is first time exposure to reflection and self-awareness. They may never have had the time allocated or the chance to stop and think.

A journal is the natural next step that AWC should adopt for students. Journal writing has shown to promote thinking and “serve the important function of integrating course content, self-knowledge, and practical experiences in teaching and learning situations.”<sup>49</sup> A journal provides a forum for the student to express thoughts, concerns, and desires that they may not want to share with others or do not feel comfortable sharing. College students in education programs questioned the use of a journal later commented, “It provided the challenge of questioning how I felt about concepts,” and “My journal helped me to gain interesting insights that I might not have gained if I didn’t write in my journal. Taking time to write in a journal also means taking time to reflect.”<sup>50</sup>

Currently the individual learning plan is the closest tool to a journal used at the War College by all students. The learning plan outlines goals that the student wants to reach during the academic year at Carlisle. The student develops the learning plan in conjunction with the faculty advisor in the first couple of months at Carlisle. The student would benefit more from the learning plan if they went through a self-awareness class or instruction prior to drafting the plan with the faculty advisor. With the other tools available the student could honestly evaluate where he is at this point in his life. After receiving feedback from their faculty advisor students could modify their plan they adjust their goals during the academic year.

If War College converted the learning plan into a daily journal, the student would have a tool to use throughout the academic year. This tool would help them follow their progress towards the personal goals that they established. The journal will serve as an idea keeper or mental jogger. To do the journal seriously requires the writer to set time aside to write. Daily journals appear to be the most effective but that may not be possible for everyone although it would be an excellent goal. The journal writing could take place prior to the first class of the day or at the end. The important thing is to establish the time and the routine to do the writing. There is time available currently to do some reflecting, the student would have to allocate the time to keep the journal.

One community whose members have kept journals to determine past performances is long distance runners. Long distance runners have used daily journals to track performance and mileage. The journal provides a source of information for the runner. Some runners have kept journals for years and are able to reflect on past performances and individual progress.

The War College journal would become part of the student package when graduating from school. The take-away from the War College will be the Myers-Briggs personality test (which

many have already experienced at least once), the leadership development and assessment tool, the individual learning plan, and the feedback from faculty advisors on the different writing and oral requirements. The journal, like the other instruments would give the student a tool for reflection in the future. It can act as another teacher, questioning why and confirming strengths and weaknesses after the student leaves the War College. The student could examine how they might have acted in a certain role or how they want to be perceived before going into a tense meeting that anyone could face in the contemporary operating environment. The journal could also serve as a leader development guide for the former student as they move back to their respective service. The journal can be a tool or an example to others who are trying to develop their own self-awareness.

## **CONCLUSION**

Research shows that because self-aware leaders know their strengths and their weaknesses, they are more self-confident. They know how they respond to certain issues, and they have experienced a series of leadership challenges the self-aware leader feels they can handle different situations either personally or through delegation. Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric explains,

There is a fine line between arrogance and self-confidence, but legitimate self-confidence is a winner. The true test of self-confidence is the courage to be open---to welcome change and new ideas regardless of their source. Self-confident people are not afraid to have their views challenged. They relish the intellectual combat that enriches ideas. They determine the ultimate openness of an organization and its ability to learn. You find these people by seeking out people who are comfortable in their own skin ---people who like who they are and are never afraid to show it.<sup>51</sup>

The strategic leader needs to have enough confidence and be so self aware that he are not afraid to keep things simple in his organization. It is the responsibility of the senior leaders to fight bureaucracy and to streamline actions. The quickest way to bog down production in any organization is by adding complicated, distracting clutter. The surest path to failure is to create sloth and sluggishness that slow down business every day.<sup>52</sup> The aware leader will recognize the actions that create these barriers to success and will fight the urge to make things more complex. Strategic leaders must have the self-confidence, the self-awareness to make meaningful changes, to transform. Effective strategic leaders have the confidence and the awareness to know what they are transforming is best for the organization.

Self-aware leaders must use the techniques available continually to improve their awareness and the awareness of their subordinates. Developing lifelong learning skills such as



reflecting, journal writing, and providing feedback are just a few examples. Identifying potential pitfalls in leadership styles and then avoiding these “fatal flaws” needs to be a goal of all leaders. It is only through this kind of self-awareness that we can develop into the kind of leaders that required for the 21<sup>st</sup> century environment.

As the military transforms, we must have confident and self-aware people leading the way. The contemporary environment that the Army is going to be working is going to require leaders who know their strengths and weaknesses and who can adapt to any challenge. Our leaders must have the ability to see their own behavior and their actions as they relate to the environment they are operating and have the confidence to make adjustments to meet the challenges.

“I learned that good judgment comes from experience and that experience grows out of mistakes.”

—General of the Army Omar N. Bradley

WORD COUNT = 6,794

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> John J. Hampton, ed. AMA Management Handbook, 3<sup>d</sup> Edition (New York: American Management Association, 1994), 4-11.

<sup>2</sup> William M. Steele and Robert P. Watlters. "21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership Competencies," Army (August 2001): 31.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, Primal Leadership (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School, 2002), 253.

<sup>4</sup> The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study Report to the Army, (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army, 2001), OS 3.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Goleman, Emotional Leadership (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Ernsbergber, "Leadership: It is not the faint of heart," Vital Speeches of the Day (Jun 1, 2000): 1 [database on line]; available from ProQuest. Accessed 21 Oct 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Dewey Johnston, "Leadership: Some Thoughts After Twenty-Five Years," available from <<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/au-24/johnson.htm>>; Internet; accessed 4 Oct 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Wharton Center for Leadership and Change Management, "Wharton Leadership Ventures: Completing the Leadership Circle," available from <[http://leadership.wharton.upenn.edu/1\\_change/trips/Self-awareness.shtml](http://leadership.wharton.upenn.edu/1_change/trips/Self-awareness.shtml)>; Internet; accessed 21 Oct 2002.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Gary Yukl, Leadership in Organizations (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee, Primal Leadership (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School, 2002), 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>14</sup> Robert J. Lee and Sara N. King, Discovering the Leader in You (San Francisco, CA: Possey-Bass, 2001), 34.

- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.
- <sup>16</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, Primal Leadership, 40.
- <sup>17</sup> Stephen R. Covey, Principle-Centered Leadership (New York: Simon and Schuster), 40.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.
- <sup>19</sup> David Maraniss, When Pride Still Mattered (New York: Simon and Schuster), 242-245.
- <sup>20</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, Primal Leadership, 253.
- <sup>21</sup> Hendrie Weisinger, Emotional Intelligence at Work (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), xvi.
- <sup>22</sup> Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, 48.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>24</sup> Hampton, ed. AMA Management Handbook, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, 4-11.
- <sup>25</sup> HRfocus, November 2002, Volume 79 No. 11, 13.
- <sup>26</sup> Joseph N. G. LeBoeuf, Feedback: A Critical Leadership Resource, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 7 April 1997), 12.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>28</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, Primal Leadership, 135.
- <sup>29</sup> LeBoeuf, 15.
- <sup>30</sup> John H. Zenger and Joseph Folkman, The Extraordinary Leader, (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2002), 65.
- <sup>31</sup> Marilyn Wood Daudelin, "Learning from Experience Through Reflection," Organizational Dynamics (Winter 1996): 37.
- <sup>32</sup> Donald A. Schon, Educating the Reflective Practitioner, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), 28.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, The Leadership Challenge, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), 85-86.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>37</sup> Schon, 26.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>39</sup> Phil Rich, "Journal Writing and Self Help,," available from <http://www.shpm.com/articles/growth/journalwrite.html>; Internet; accessed 15 Dec 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Tucker, Jane Sojka, Frank Barone and Anne McCarthy, "Training Tomorrow Leaders: Enhancing the Emotional Intelligence of Business Graduates," Jul/Aug 2000; available from [http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/results/results\\_single.jhtml?nn=38](http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/results/results_single.jhtml?nn=38); Internet; accessed 7 Nov 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Kaplan, "How to Overcome Your Strengths," Fast Company Online May 1999 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.fastcompany.com/online/24/toolbox.html>; Internet; accessed 26 Oct 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>45</sup> Morgan W. McCall, Jr. and Michael M. Lombardo, "What Makes a Top Executive?," Psychology Today, February 1983, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Zenger and Folkman, 241.

<sup>47</sup> Steele and Walters, p.32.

<sup>48</sup> Howard G. Haas, The Leader Within, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers), 6.

<sup>49</sup> R.J. Yinger and M. Clark, Reflective Journal Writing: Theory and Practice. Occasional Paper No. 50. (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University), 25.

<sup>50</sup> Elaine Surbeck, Eunhye Park Han, and Joan E. Moyer, Assessing Reflective Responses in Journals, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Jack Welch, Straight From the Gut, (New York: Warner Books), 384.

<sup>52</sup> Jack Welch, Jack Welch and the GE Way, (New York: McGraw-Hill), 140-141.

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