



Be – Know – Do: *Leadership the Army Way*

Hesselbein and Shinseki

Josey-Bass

ISBN 0-787907083-2

171 pages

Introduction

When asked who does the best job at developing leaders, Peter Drucker and Jack Welch offered the same enthusiastic response – the United States military. With that remarkable endorsement comes *Be – Know – Do*, an adaptation of the *Field Manual for Army Leadership*.

“...because the Army does not have the luxury of raiding competitors for leadership talent, its top leaders must devote themselves to and succeed in developing new generations of leaders...”

Leadership is “a way of life and underscores every organizational endeavor.” According to the authors, “leadership is most important when the stakes are highest” and “must be continuously developed, patiently nurtured and tested...”

What a Leader Must Be, Know, and Do

Everyone has the opportunity to lead. How do you prepare yourself for the leadership opportunities in your future? The Army takes leadership development seriously. According to General Eric K. Shinseki (USA Ret.), “We have committed ourselves to doing two things well each and every day – train soldiers, grow them into leaders.”

Acting on this resolve, the Army has clearly defined leadership as “influencing people – by providing purpose, direction and motivation – while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization.” This kind of leadership must occur at every level of the organization. This commitment to build leadership throughout the organization paid great dividends in the confusion following the D-Day landing in 1944. A scattered force gathered in ad hoc bands to accomplish the essential tasks of the mission. This was possible only because everyone in the force had been trained to think and act as a leader. “D-day was a success because of leadership at every level.”

The three aspects of leadership are Be (who you are inside), Know (what you know), and Do (how you act). Character is the foundation of leadership. People want to follow leaders who are honest, competent, forward-looking, and inspiring. The Army has a very specific list of values that are driven throughout the force – loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. Building on the foundation of strong character, a leader must develop professional competence. This competence must be demonstrated across the categories of interpersonal skills, conceptual skills, job-related skills, and tactical or problem-solving skills. Finally, leaders take action – they do! Leaders take action to build mission focused teams, to achieve results and accomplish change. This is accomplished by using interpersonal skills to move the team in the direction of a goal, accomplishing results in line with the mission of the organization, and by leaving the team in better shape than they found it (Influencing, Operating, and Improving). Before leading, leaders must learn to follow. A good follower is a loyal subordinate.

Lessons for Civilian Organizations:

1. Leadership is the ability to mobilize people to accomplish the organization’s mission.
2. Leaders are primarily distinguished by their character. Who the leader is will drive what the leader does.

3. Leadership development is a necessary organizational investment and a significant responsibility in every leader's job description.

The Character of Leaders

Growing leaders in the military doesn't begin with others, but with a focus on oneself. Character is the "real leverage" in developing leaders. Knowledge and skills cannot compensate for a lack of character. The Army begins the character building process with a commitment to values, "the principles that guide behavior." Army values instruct soldiers as to "what they need to be, every day, in every action they take." Effective leaders recruit according to values recognizing that values drive behavior.

Leaders must demonstrate and develop the mental attributes of:

- Will – the drive to keep going in spite of obstacles or exhaustion
- Self-discipline – the ability to master impulses
- Initiative – a capacity to be a self-starter
- Judgment – the ability to size up a situation quickly, prioritize issues and make decisions
- Self-confidence – belief in your personal competence and skills
- Intelligence – more than IQ, it is the ability to reflect and learn
- Cultural awareness – recognize and value the differences represented by other people

Leaders must demonstrate and develop the physical attributes, stamina and vitality. These qualities are derived from health and physical fitness. "People who are physically fit feel more competent and confident."

Leaders must demonstrate and develop emotional attributes – self-control, balance, and stability. No one wants to follow a leader who is erratic and unpredictable. Emotionally balanced leaders are sensitive and display the right emotion for the situation. Equally, they are "levelheaded under pressure." Leaders model a calm rationality under pressure.

Lessons for Civilian Organizations:

1. Leadership is more than a role, but a person with mental, emotional and physical dimensions.
2. Leaders must grow themselves before they can grow others.
3. Exemplary leaders model the way by leading and living in a manner consistent with core values and beliefs.

People Are at the Core

The Army can only function as a team, a team of living, breathing human beings. Treating people with respect builds loyalty and commitment. Military leaders see taking care of their soldiers as their first priority. This means "creating a disciplined environment where they can learn and grow."

Army leaders cultivate the core interpersonal skills of communicating, supervising and mentoring. Leaders must make their expectations of others clear. Herb Kelleher, head of Southwest Airlines, "The important thing is to take the bricklayer and make him understand that he's building a home, not just laying bricks." Communication empowers followers to take actions consistent with the larger mission of the organization. Leaders must exhibit well-developed skills of persuasion to work through resistance and build support for plans and initiatives. The effectiveness of communication is impacted by the listener, but ultimately the responsibility of the leader. "Wise leaders always check to make sure they have been heard." Communication should occur with the highest degree of transparency possible. Finally, communication includes attentiveness to both verbal and non-verbal cues.

Supervising is a responsibility that is distributed throughout the military force and occurs at the most direct level possible. Over-centralization undermines empowerment while the absence of supervision leads to

disintegration. Subordinates are given clear objectives, the resources needed to accomplish the objectives and the opportunity to succeed or fail in pursuit of the objectives. Additionally, supervisors empower their followers by the effective use of encouragement and recognition.

Finally, leaders mentor followers. “Because leaders don’t know which of their subordinates today will be the most significant contributors and leaders in the future, they strive to provide all their subordinates with the knowledge and skills necessary to become the best they can be – for the Army and for themselves.” World-class leaders spend 50 – 60 percent of their time mentoring and developing leaders.

Leaders create an environment conducive to leadership development. Teams with high morale function more effectively and produce extraordinary results. Climate, the way members feel about the organization, is the essence of morale. Evaluate organizational climate by asking:

- Does the leader set clear priorities and goals?
- Is there a workable system of recognition, rewards and punishment?
- Do leaders know what they’re doing? ...admit when they’re wrong?
- Do leaders seek input from subordinates?
- Do junior leaders have authority to make decisions consistent with the leader’s intent?
- Are there high levels of internal stress and negative competition in the organization? What changes are being initiated?
- Does the leader behave the way they talk?
- Do leaders lead from the front?
- Do leaders talk to their organizations on a regular basis?

“Characteristics of successful organizational climates include a clear, widely known intent; well-trained and confident soldiers; disciplined, cohesive teams; and trusted, competent leadership.”

Climate, how people feel, feeds into culture – “shared attitudes, values, goals and practices.” Culture has much more influence on behavior than policies or job descriptions.

Lessons for Civilian Organizations:

1. Focus on people – the organization’s intangible assets.
2. Take care of the people on your team.
3. Work to clearly communicate the big picture.
4. The ability to mentor others is a basic leadership competency.
5. Create a climate and culture that strengthens morale.

Leading from the Front

Army leaders don’t lead from the ivory tower, but “lead from the front and stay close to the action.” There are three levels of leadership in the military structure:

- Direct frontline leadership – This is face-to-face leadership where subordinates are developed one-on-one. These leaders are seen regularly by their followers and operate in an environment of greater certainty and less organizational complexity.
- Organizational leadership – This is leadership of a much broader scope executed through levels of front-line leaders. Organizational leaders utilize the same skills as would a front-line leader, but on a bigger scale. Organizational leaders focus on a planning and goal setting period of two to ten years.
- Strategic leadership – These leaders are responsible for large, complex organizations. They focus on aligning resources and structures with long-term strategic plans. Operating in uncertain, highly complex environments, strategic leaders think for the total environment in which the Army functions. Because of the long-range scope of their responsibilities, these leaders must effectively choose and develop subordinate leaders.

Lessons for Civilian Organizations:

1. Leading from the front requires an intimate knowledge of what is happening on the front lines. At least some of this information must be acquired on a first-hand basis.
2. Leading from the front requires setting the example. Leaders go first, set the pace. This is particularly important in seasons of uncertainty and stress.
3. Leading from the front requires providing clear direction. This clarity includes establishing a clear vision of the future and also the inspiration to pursue the vision with passion.
4. Leading from the front requires building morale and a determination to win. When leaders don't lead from the front, the organization suffers: trust dissolves, rumors abound, new initiatives are resisted, people look out from themselves, and fear reigns. These are the hallmarks of terrible morale."

It Takes a Team

"Virtually every executive staff I've ever come across believes in teamwork. Sadly, a scarce few of them make teamwork a reality in their organizations," says teamwork expert Patrick Lencioni. Leadership is not a solo performance, but an effort to craft different personalities and capabilities into a cohesive team. *The Manual of Army Leadership* stresses that the Army *only* works as a team.

With hard work and strong interpersonal skills, leaders build teams that:

- Put the good of the team first
- Work together to accomplish the mission
- Execute tasks thoroughly and quickly
- Meet or exceed standards
- Thrive on demanding challenges
- Learn from their experiences and are proud of their accomplishments

On what foundation is teamwork built?

1. Trust – Subordinates trust leaders who "know how to do their jobs and act consistently."
2. Communication – Caring, teambuilding leaders share as much information as possible. They cultivate an environment of open dialogue, sharing and soliciting information.
3. Loyalty – "People will do the most extraordinary things for their buddies."
4. Selfless service – Effective teams consist of people who give themselves to the team's mission.
5. Respect – Leaders insure that differences are appreciated and that people are treated with civility.
6. Discipline – One Desert Storm leader asserted, "Discipline coupled with tough, realistic training is the key to high morale in units. Soldiers want to belong to good outfits." Discipline is demonstrated by teams who "respond to the will of the leader, whether he is there or not."

Team building occurs over a three stage process – formation, enrichment and sustainment. Leaders manage the first impressions that occur when new members are received on to the team. Training enriches the team by building collective proficiency. Sustainment occurs when team members think of the team as their team.

Leaders must model loyalty to the team and build ownership of team goals. Directional clarity is at the heart of this ownership transfer and enables subordinates to work together effectively.

Team building is complicated by an increasing diversity. The Army is ahead of the curve in fostering an environment in which vital teams emerge from a diverse population.

Lessons for Civilian Organizations:

1. Teamwork must be supported by underlying values such as respect, self-less service and loyalty.

2. Teams must foster an environment where collective goals are jointly owned and constructive disagreement is intentionally fostered.
3. Communication is the vital life-blood of effective teams.

Managing Complexity, Leading Change

Successful change processes are always the product of effective leadership. Leaders proactively lead change by anticipating changing environments and future needs. This requires every leader to be an aggressive learner. General George C. Marshall (1880-1959) became the Army Chief of Staff in 1939. Marshall recognized that he would oversee a massive transformation of the Army during his tenure and that would require learning “new tricks that were not taught in the military manuals or on the battlefield.” He led the military from an interwar malaise to become a world changing force of over 8,000,000 soldiers.

Every new generation of leadership opportunity brings accelerating change. Technology alone is forcing the Army to adapt at an unprecedented pace. The Army developed an acronym to capture the issues driving the accelerating change and increasing complexity of the challenge faced by military leaders – VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity). Volatility is included because change is not “gradual and predictable, but discontinuous and surprising.” Uncertainty refers to the inability to adequately process the avalanche of information and interpret it correctly. Complexity captures the interconnectedness of events and decision variables. Ambiguity appreciates the reality that “change often brings paradox.” Because of this VUCA environment, leaders must think across multiple dimensions and demonstrate a mature flexibility. Without question, leadership is the essential element to insure effective change management.

There is a profound succinctness to the statement “change is inevitable; trying to avoid it is futile.” Leaders manage change in a way that keeps the organization moving in the direction of the desired outcomes. The eight stages of the change process are:

1. Demonstrate a sense of urgency with the needs for and benefits of the proposed change.
2. Form coalitions to guide the change process from start to finish.
3. Build a vision and strategy for the future.
4. Communicate the vision aggressively and repeatedly throughout the organization.
5. Empower subordinates to take initiative in implementing the change.
6. Plan for and stage short-term successes as validation of the change process.
7. Consolidate and communicate the short-term wins broadly.
8. Reinforce the change until it is embedded in the culture of the organization.

Leadership and communication are in a symbiotic relationship. Part of the communication challenge includes clarifying the change while honoring the past. Change “doesn’t dishonor the past, it builds on it.”

Lessons for Civilian Organizations:

1. Change will only be as successful as the change process is effectively led.
2. Before initiating a change, ask:
 - a. Are our values for making the change clear and compelling?
 - b. Do our leaders have adequate ethos within the organization to pull off the change?
 - c. Do we value the people within our organization and are we treating them in a way that reflects this?
 - d. What are our leadership strengths? What needs to be strengthened?
 - e. Are we growing our leadership capacity at every level of the organization?
 - f. Do we have strong teams that are pursuing the team goals over personal agendas?
 - g. Do we communicate effectively and have mechanisms for assuring that we are being heard?
3. Does our change process include a mechanism for allowing people to say goodbye to the past?

Building and Leading Learning Organizations

The Army is committed to be a learning organization and rewards self-development efforts. The authors quote Frederick the Great who said, “What good is experience if you do not reflect?” Experiences are opportunities from which we draw lessons. To establish an organizational climate that rewards collective learning, the Army has established the Center for Army Lessons Learned.

This requires courage – to try new things, to honestly evaluate, and to receive constructive feedback. Leaders must create a developmental environment that facilitates learning experiences. When there is no room for mistakes, people eventually stop informing the leader mistakes happen.

The Army has created a powerful learning tool, the After Action Review. The purpose of the AAR is to discover the strengths and weaknesses of an action or project or initiative, propose solutions to identified problems and adopt changes for future actions. The AAR is a very specific activity.

- They are conducted during or immediately after an event.
- The evaluation is done in light of established objectives.
- They focus on performance.
- They involve all participants in the discussion.
- They use open-ended questions.
- They identify strengths and weaknesses.
- They link performance to subsequent training.

The four principles the AAR:

1. Every individual can, and should, participate if he or she has an insight, observation, or question that will help the unit identify and correct deficiencies or maintain strengths.
2. AAR’s maximize training benefits and organizational learning by allowing soldiers, regardless of rank, to learn from each other.
3. An AAR is not a critique.
4. The AAR does not grade success or failure.

AAR’s can be conducted on a formal or informal basis. Formal AAR’s are high level events that include extensive evaluation for which preparation is required. They follow a structured outline:

- Introduction – Participants must understand that they are invited to participate when necessary and encouraged to offer honest feedback.
- Review of Objectives and Intent – The AAR is an evaluation in light of the established objectives of the event.
- Discussion of Recent Events – This is a simple review of what happened during the event.
- Analysis of Key Issues – The leader can be flexible in conducting this section of the review. Essentially, this is the evaluation of what was particularly effective, what was not, and what should be done differently in the future.
- Concluding Summary – Finally, the leader concludes the review with a summary of key points identified during the discussion.
- Follow-up – Before ending the review, any action items are assigned with follow-up accountabilities established.

Informal AAR’s are done in the context of the event and are simple reflections on what went well, what went poorly and what should be done differently in the future.

Lessons for Civilian Organizations:

1. Developing leaders and developing learners are essentially intertwined.
2. Make learning an integral part of the normal flow of life at work.
3. Create an infrastructure for learning requires that reflection and action be integrated.
4. The greatest challenge to the implementation of AAR's will be encouraging openness among those involved.
5. For AAR's to be effective the leader must cultivate "candor, open discussion, teamwork, the admission of ignorance or mistakes, and an optimistic belief that we can shape a better tomorrow.

Conclusion

"Orders and commands don't plant the seeds of commitment; leadership does." Leaders drive performance and results. The single lesson one must capture from the Army development process is that "leadership is a matter of the quality and character of the leader." Leaders of character draw followers into participation in the mission of the organization and belief in its values. "If motivation in our organization is based on carrots and sticks, then the organization is always at the mercy of those who can offer more or bigger carrots." If military leaders can inspire subordinates to make the ultimate sacrifice, leaders can certainly make a dramatic impact in the mundane day-to-day of corporate America. Therefore, leaders must focus not on "how-tos," but on "how-to-bes." "The leader mobilizes people around the mission of the organization, making it a powerful force in times of uncertainty."

Facilitated Discussion Questions:

1. The primary assumption of *Be – Know – Do* is that leadership begins with and is sustained by character? What character traits are necessary to be an effective leader?
2. What character traits undermine effective leadership?
3. What is required to grow in character or to grow new character traits?
4. What must a leader do to demonstrate their care for and commitment to the people on their team?
5. To lead from the front, a leader must stay in touch with people at every level of the organization. What can a leader do to stay connected to the grass roots of his or her team?
6. How can a leader determine if they are communicating to the team in an effective way and to an adequate degree?
7. How effective are we at implementing change? Do we have an established approach for initiating a change process in the organization? Identify the last few change initiatives. What kinds of things went well? What kinds of things didn't go well?
8. Why is the AAR (or PAR as it is referred to in conjunction with the leadership project) an effective learning tool? Why is it an effective accountability tool? What would it look like for you to begin to implement the *informal* AAR or PAR with your team?