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TITLE Are You Really A Commander?

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Are You Really A Commander?

There is no such person as a bad commander. You either command, or you don't command. There are those who call themselves commanders. They feel that, when they sign their name to a document and the word "commanding" appears after it, they are, in fact, commanders. This could not be further from the truth. These people are simply deluding themselves. How do you know if you are a commander?

Many papers have been written by great men who extol such traits and characteristics as integrity, loyalty, patience, fortitude, prudence, endurance, and the like. You usually reach the same conclusion at the end of each of these articles - a man must have all of these qualities to a marked degree in order to be a commander. It is not my purpose to propose any great change to the generally accepted doctrine of the personality make-up of a commander. It is my purpose to discuss, in every day examples, the indicators of a commander. You may not be able in a sober reflection of self to determine whether you have the necessary degree of fortitude that so and so in his book said that you must have in order to be a commander. But you will know whether you possess these indicators and then know that you do, or do not, command.

Indicators of a Commander

1. Do you train your immediate subordinates?

Before you answer with a very rapid yes and move on to the next indicator, stop and think of all this question entails. It means that if you are a Company Commander, do you train your Lieutenants? Do you instruct them in leadership principles and techniques - a

subject too often neglected? Do you take it for granted, that because they have been to their basic officers' course, they are well versed in the techniques of leadership that have taken many years for you to learn and are still learning? This indicator means more than setting the example. ("I teach a superior class. They observe; therefore they should be able to take the platform and do the same job!") It means more than giving them responsibility and then "stomping" on them if they fail. If that shoe fits you, perhaps you had better "stomp" yourself first. Somewhere along the line, you may not have given them the guidance they needed, and probably wanted, along with this responsibility. By the standards of indicator number one and with a more careful analysis, are you a commander?

2. Do you tell your immediate subordinates "what to do", or do you tell them "how to do it"?

This is a well-known indicator; yet, as well known as it is, it is still one of the most violated. Why? Many officers in command positions say that they are merely giving guidance, not telling the subordinate how to do the job. Guidance is important and necessary and cannot be overlooked. You step across the line of guidance when you tell a subordinate a detailed method by which he can accomplish the mission. Give your staff officer his mission. Be certain that he completely understands it. Once he understands what is expected of him, let him go ahead and do it. If he comes up short, give him the guidance that is necessary to complete the job to your satisfaction. If he has the feeling that he can do the job in his own way and that you will approve it, you have a staff officer

who will be an asset to you. If he and the other staff officers have this feeling, then you are not stifling initiative. Are you still a commander?

3. Are you concerned with every aspect of the well-being of your immediate subordinates?

Before you jump to your feet growling with indignation that, "I look out for the welfare of ALL my men!", let me caution you on the phrase immediate subordinates. You are a Company Commander - PFC Smith comes to see you, and you help him. Smith goes away satisfied and singing your praises. You lean back in your chair, smiling with the inward warmth of accomplishing something useful. You are adhering to the principle of the welfare of your men. BUT, in the next office, Lt Jones, recently assigned platoon leader, has a problem that is just as serious as PFC Smith's. Do you help your platoon leader? Are you as concerned about his problems as you are with the rest of the men in your unit? Too often, we take such good care of our Privates that we neglect our Lieutenants and Master Sergeants. Included in this concern for the welfare of our immediate subordinates, is the need for you, the Commander, to make the Army as attractive as possible to these men. I don't mean by that, that you should coddle them, train only in good weather, and work only from eight to five. I do mean that the Army can be made attractive or very unattractive, depending upon the man-in-charge. That man is the Commander. Do you hold a daily meeting after quitting hours every day to tell your junior leaders that the uniform tomorrow will be cushion sole woolen socks, kakhi in color; boots, black in color; white "T" shirts?

You laugh! There^{are} quite a few men in command positions in the Army right now who are doing just that very thing. They are not commanders. They merely write the word "commanding" after their name. Too often you hear the expression, "The Army isn't supposed to be attractive!" Isn't this merely a means used by a person to cover up some of his stupid idiosyncrasies that he heaps upon the unfortunate men that have to serve under him? Do you make the Army as attractive as you can for your leaders, and do you concern yourself with the welfare of your immediate subordinates? Do you command?

4. Do your junior commanders really command?

If you are the Battalion Commander, do your Company Commanders command their Companies, or do they simply parrot your commands? This makes everything very nicely "SOP". There is a tremendous amount of good to be gained from standardization of SOME things. After awhile however, it becomes a case of the tail wagging the dog. We begin to SOP things for the sake of SOP. It is at this point that we should stop. In an attempt to SOP have you squelched the voices of your Company Commanders? If you are a Company Commander, are your Lieutenants commanding their platoons, or are you still, in thought, a platoon leader?

5. Are you aloof from your immediate subordinates? Are you too close to them?

The two seem to run hand-in-glove. A Commander must reach and maintain that all too elusive happy medium. You cannot operate on one set of standards during duty hours and on an entirely different set during other hours ("Call me by my first name off duty, but

stand to during duty hours!"). It simply doesn't work. Many have tried, and too few have succeeded. On the same token, a person who is aloof from his immediate subordinates generally will not ^{have} their complete confidence, which he must have. No one can tell you where that happy medium is - it's different for every personality involved and situation encountered. Have you found it? Are you commanding?

6. Are your actions dictated by the application of common sense?

There must be allowances to this precept of "living by the book". A commander must be prepared for those cases that merit a deviation from the norm. Common sense will tell you the time. It will also guide you in your method of solving the particular problem. Those who live fanatically by the book will just as surely die by that same book, if they are not prepared to let common sense take over when needed. An instructor who is presenting an introductory type period to recruits under intolerable weather conditions, lacks common sense. The staff officer who allows this, lacks common sense. They sometimes excuse their stand by stating that "Troops must learn to fight in all kinds of weather". This is all well and good for troops who have finished their basic learning phase. It is nonsensical when applied to recruits who haven't even learned their serial numbers.

7. Do you accept responsibility for your actions?

A most admirable and respected quality in any man is a willingness to accept responsibility for his actions. The real test of this quality occurs when a mistake has been made by him or one of his immediate subordinates. If you unflinchingly adhere to "A Commander is responsible for everything his unit does or fails to do", then

you are a commander. Accepting responsibility is, in some respects, the true measure of a man. It reflects the mental, physical, and moral courage that you must have to be a commander. Some pay lip service to this indicator when face to face with it. They say "Lt Jones did it, but if I had known about it, I certainly would never have tolerated it. I'll take the responsibility!". This man has already edged himself out of the picture and focused attention on the Lieutenant. Do you really accept responsibility for your actions?

8. Do you study your superiors, sifting their good points from their bad? Do you apply only the good points you observe?

You must, to be a commander, constantly study the principles and techniques of command. What better teachers are there than other commanders? All have some bad points, and all have many good points. The most outstanding commander in the world would be that man who had adapted every good feature of every commander to his personality. He must also have an awareness of their bad points, keen enough to stop him from copying those bad points. Don't be oblivious to an outstanding commander's bad points. If you'll push aside the rose colored hue that you have shrouded him with, you are almost certain to find a few shortcomings. This is not to degrade him in your eyes. It simply established that he is human after all.

9. Do you constantly strive to do the ordinary in an outstanding manner?

By this I don't mean the showmanship type of thing that we often call eye-wash. If you have a class to teach on a run-of-the-mill subject, do you go overboard in an effort to make it the best class

your men have ever heard? There are hundreds of times each day that you have the opportunity to do the ordinary in an outstanding manner. The importance of this indicator cannot be minimized. It is this one that will emit a spirit that will saturate your entire unit with unbelievable excellence. It will enable your unit, with you as the commander, to go that extra mile.

10. Are you dedicated?

If you had to take one indicator that stands head and shoulders above all the rest, it would be, dedication. If a man is dedicated, then he will have integrity. If a man is dedicated, then he will most certainly have loyalty. A dedicated man will be a prudent man, and a just man. If he is dedicated, then he cannot possibly fall short. A dedicated man will apply the other nine indicators. If you possess this indicator, you have the battle won. All that is left for you is to smooth off the edges.

These are some of the indicators of a commander. They either fit, or they don't fit. If they don't, an honest self-analysis, coupled with a realization of your shortcomings, can accomplish wonders. There is no such person as a bad commander. You either command, or you don't command.

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