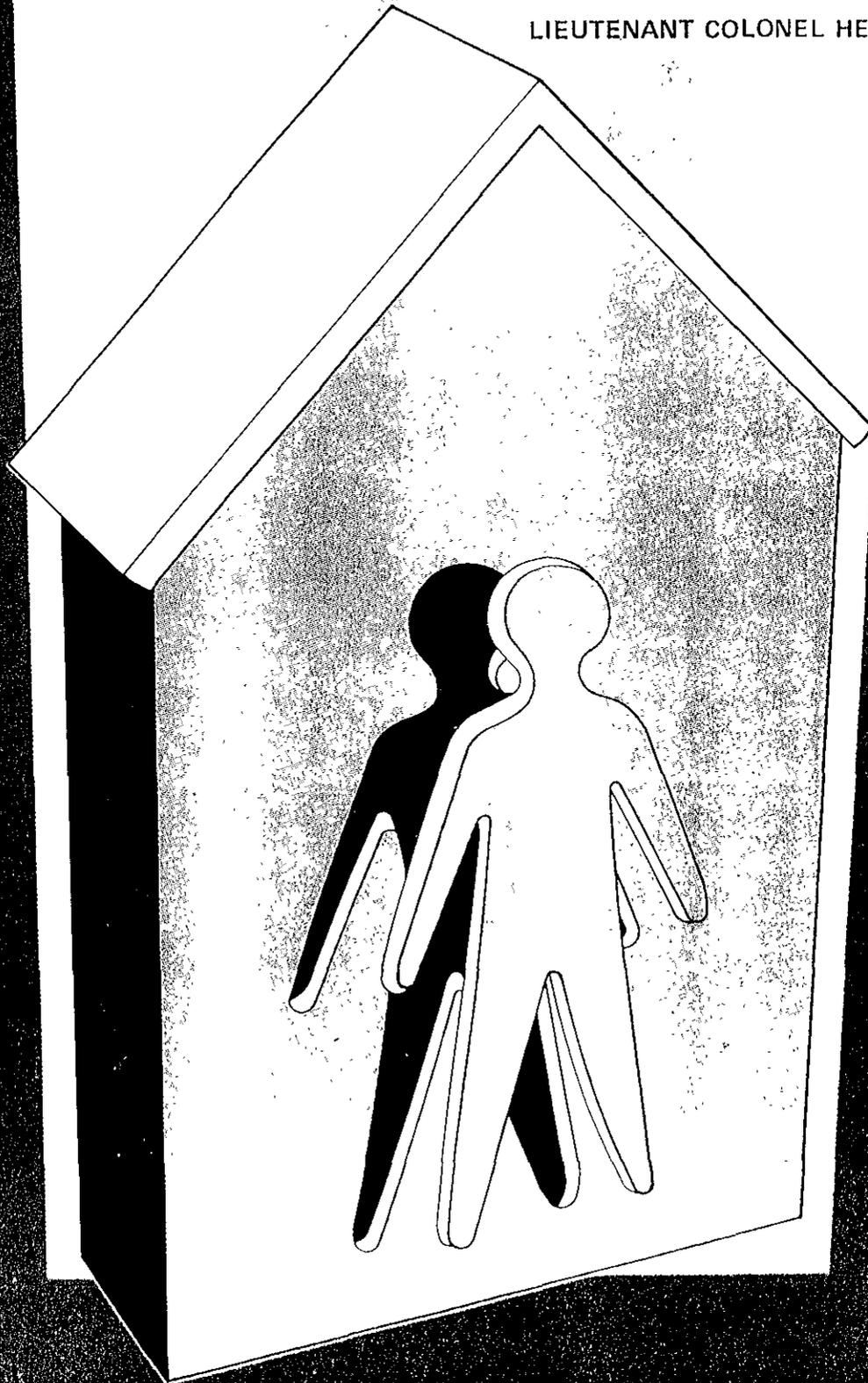


A Personal Reflection On Leadership

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Sooner or later, in associating with Army schools, one is drawn into both formal and informal discussions and analyses of leadership and management. And in a sense, I've seen the A to Z of Army schools after three years at the United States Military Academy and another three at the Army War College.

The degree to which leadership and management are related is a common theme in these discussions and a contentious one. The traditional analysis of this relationship is based upon reading about "the great Captains" and their critical decisions and upon the classics of literature. But today this analysis seems to have been labelled "quaint and useless" and relegated to the dustbin by those who advance a "scientific" approach to leadership and management. Systems analysts and devotees of organizational effectiveness treat with contempt the old soldiers who yearn for something called "good old-fashioned leadership" but who cannot seem to define it.

I think I understand why the new breed is dissatisfied with historical and literary insights into leadership and with the intuitive sense of old soldiers. Its members are trying, through a systematic analysis, to produce something useful that can be transmitted to the next generation of leaders. Their purpose, in other words, is to institutionalize competence.

If this is so and if it can be expressed in such moderate terms, why do I personally resist their efforts? I do so, I think, because I see this as just another step in the dehumanizing trend of the modern era. There seems to be an inclination to view people as production units, as parts of a machine, to be manipulated and arranged to function harmoniously, thus bringing order out of chaos and imposing efficiency on organizations. It seems mechanistic to me, and I don't like it.

I should warn you that I hold some romantic notions about what it means to be a soldier and that I have some strong feelings about *my* Army. These notions and feelings are certainly not universally shared by professional soldiers, but I know there are some others who hold similar views.

Today, we have a plastic Army that is mesmerized by appearance, a white rocks and zero defects philosophy that leads to dishonesty and, inexorably, to false "body counts." We have an assignment system that ensures dilettantism, one that produces generals who are conversant with a multitude of issues but expert in none. We have a centrally managed personnel system that results in selfishness among officers as they pursue a much-criticized but nevertheless ever-present careerism. We are fascinated by the gadgets and the technology that dominate our thinking while we give only lip service to the human dimension of combat. We talk about trust and confidence but have forgotten the meanings of the words.

We have an Army school system that is superficial, a system that discourages thinking complex problems through while emphasizing "point papers" and quick fixes. Both our successes and our failures in war stem

from our reliance upon our rich material resources. We have a military-congressional-industrial complex that often does the wrong things for the wrong reasons. We have a political system that virtually guarantees we will be led by amateurs for the first year or two of each new administration. Despite the "Age of the Manager" we have so many systems and projects with lives of their own that they are no longer subject to control and management. Our officers are so busy "working the problem" that they rarely step back to puzzle out how the parts come together.

The real problem in all this is that we have lost our perspective. We have lost the human dimension. As individual officers, we may not be able to remedy many of the serious defects in the Army, but I believe we can certainly restore the human dimension to the way we lead men.

INFLUENCES

Long before I encountered the gurus of organizational behavior and the vocabulary of modern management, my unscientific personal philosophy of leadership had already been formed by certain powerful influences, the effects of which I'll probably take to my grave. These influences included working class origins, urban life, large family, Catholic school education, love of the humanities, and military experience, not to mention sheer accident, perhaps as important as all the other influences combined.

My study and teaching experiences allowed me to pick and choose *a la carte* from the sciences, social sciences, professional training, and purely trade skills, but when I sat down for a full meal I invariably selected from the humanities to eat my version of the truth. To round out this venture into introspection in a few bold strokes, I have flirted with the romantic and classical points of departure and have found myself vacillating between them — sometimes emphasizing feeling and emotion, sometimes leaning toward intellect and pure reason. As a result of these formative experiences, then, my rather late introduction to such writers as MacGregor, Drucker, Maslow, Skinner, and Herzberg made them less important to me than they seemed to be to many of my military colleagues. (For one thing, my working class origins had made it impossible for me to think of the led as "they.")

Much as I share with my fellow man a craving for understanding of self, society, and influence, I would be dishonest if I failed to express my doubts regarding those who pretend to express universal principles when, in fact, their efforts are merely journeyman solutions to the here and now.

My own philosophy of leadership, therefore, has two essential components and an almost infinite list of corollaries to support them: There are jobs in the Army that need doing and that can provide great satisfaction to a



soldier, even though some require doing ugly tasks; and because of the inevitable mismatches of job and man, as well as the ugly tasks, a leader must show compassion, humor, and honesty in dealing with his men.

Leaders must avoid the temptation to narrow their views to encompass only the tasks and the units for which they are directly responsible. Certainly, immediate tasks and the organization in which a leader finds himself tend to crowd out a more abstract concern for the Army as an institution and for the soldier as an individual. But the concrete problems of today, unfortunately, too often blind leaders to longer term gains for both the institution and the soldier.

For example, frequently in my experience I have seen someone in authority block a soldier from advancement in rank or from more gratifying work by declaring him "mission-essential" when, in fact, it was possible — at only a small sacrifice in efficiency — to make do with another man instead. Worse, although this was normally done in the name of organizational effectiveness, one had to suspect that the desire of the man in charge to look good to his superiors was the true motive behind such a decision. The irony is that often the one unhappy soldier whose desire was thwarted soon multiplied in kind as other soldiers realized that the boss regarded them as no more than spare parts for a machine designed to make him look good. Releasing a soldier so that he might realize his desire does make the boss look good to his other troops — they recognize that he "took a hit" for the sake of that soldier.

Obviously, good judgment must play a role in this:

tearing a unit apart to make a soldier happy is not the solution. Admittedly, to get some long-range good we must get through the short range, day-to-day tasks that most of the Army in the field must face. But the point of this component of my philosophy is simply that leaders should care about their soldiers; soldiers will recognize this concern, will be happier for it, and will perform their duties better and with less supervision. The mere pretense of concern is not enough. The concern must be real.

But the ugly and inescapable tasks of our Army must still be done. Remote areas, an atmosphere of danger, and dull or unpleasant work are all part of the soldier's life, parts that are not to be explained away by a glib tongue or a poster on a unit bulletin board. Some things must simply be endured. But they are best endured by soldiers whose leaders are honest in recognizing the unpleasant conditions and in explaining to soldiers why they must accept those conditions.

SHARING

By sharing dull or dirty tasks with soldiers in a good-humored manner, a leader does not transform those tasks into something pleasant, but his visibility and cheerful support are sometimes all he can give his soldiers. There is no way to pretend that 12-hour shifts in the hold of a ship being unloaded in the tropics, while sweat mixes with leaking cement bags, is fun, but it helps to have the leader present, too, instead of in an air-conditioned trailer somewhere. Understanding and compassion on the part of a leader can at least allow a soldier to realize that some other human being recognizes the boredom and the sense of hopelessness he sometimes feels.

My experience tells me that we would have done better in Vietnam had we emulated the North Vietnamese regimental commander who got wet when his soldiers got wet, was feverish when they were feverish, and was hungry when they were hungry. (The contrast between beating the bush and living at a base camp disturbs combat soldiers, but it characterizes our system, a system filled with anomalies.) A leader's readiness to get the job done while demonstrating true concern for his soldiers may appear to be a bromide, but I have found that the truth often has that appearance.

RELEVANCE

The major management theories developed since World War II have some relevance, and I would not deny that they have caused me to reflect, which is, after all, the intention of their creators. I do not question the allegation that people conditioned to ever-rising expectations, including job satisfaction, cannot be motivated by the means used in an earlier stage of industrialization or by the means used during a great depression. Management *is* increasingly complex;

technology is driving us to unknown terrain; differentiation of tasks at the bottom of the workforce hierarchy is taking place. The old assumptions *don't* work. I absolutely agree with the concept that more and more the boss must realize that he works for the people who work for him. The formulation delights me. But while I find these theories generally useful, I would like to debunk their originality.

ANCIENT EXAMPLES

For example, Tacitus, in *The Germania*, written less than a century after the birth of Christ, described the interrelationship between the leader and the led: "On the field of battle it is a disgrace to a chief to be surpassed in courage by his followers, and to the followers not to equal the courage of their chief. And to leave a battle alive after their chief has fallen means lifelong infamy and shame. To defend and protect him, and to let him get the credit for their own acts of heroism, are the most solemn obligations to their allegiance."

The barbarian tribes the Romans fought had a highly developed sense of management by objective, and at least one Roman noted that for posterity. Barbaric tribesmen knew some time ago what we seem to have learned only recently: a small team cooperating on a project produces a better result, and the team members feel good about themselves. True, we don't know which is the chicken and which the egg, but we do know that there is a connection between job satisfaction and productivity.

Skinner and the behaviorists caused great debate about the way man is motivated, but Alexander Pope, in his *Essay on Man*, written in 1733-34, said something similar: "Two principals in human nature reign:/ Self-love to urge, and reason to restrain. . ." He went on to say, "Self-love and reason to one end aspire,/ Pain their aversion, pleasure their desire." To me, he captures in the first two lines the essence of Freud's ego, id, and superego, and in the next two lines Skinner's pain-pleasure thesis of human motivation. And I prefer Pope to Skinner as well as to Freud.

MacGregor has an intellectual grandfather in Niccolo Machiavelli. Theory X and Theory Y are interesting, even appealing, and the notions ring true to me. But I prefer Machiavelli's version of the same idea as expressed in *The Prince*, published in 1532: "Every prince must desire to be considered merciful and not cruel. . . From this arises the question whether it is better to be loved more than feared, or feared more than loved." He concludes that it is best to be both feared and loved, but that "as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved. . . for love is held by a chain of obligation which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purposes; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails." Clearly, Machiavelli commends Theory X to the leader, but he equally clearly recognizes alternatives.

The poet E.E. Cummings beat Maslow to the punch in

1925 with this cryptic reference to man's hierarchy of needs: "Humanity i love you because when you're hard up you pawn your intelligence to buy a drink." Going farther back, the Communist promise of peace, bread, and land in 1917, and still farther, Christ's "I am the bread of life" both suggest a clear understanding of what Maslow is talking about — a man's basic needs must be satisfied before he can focus his attention on abstractions.

It is not my intention even to suggest that the gurus of organizational effectiveness have failed to contribute to better management. Most of my peers are keenly aware of their contributions, reflect on their concepts and techniques, and apply them to try to improve the Army. But the question I have posed to myself in this essay is how relevant the gurus are to me. And my answer is: not very. My mentors are to be found elsewhere, in those men who have applied their thinking to the human condition. They dwarf those whose concern reaches only as far as the workplace.

The involvement of a leader with his soldiers is far broader and deeper than that of a factory manager with his workforce. I would prefer to have officers read more deeply in the humanities over the years than to have them take crash courses in fads. When modern management theory goes beyond the manipulation of human beings and suggests that the leaders must love the led, and when civilian managers take pride in sharing danger with their workers, I'll begin to listen to them more carefully. Should Tacitus, Machiavelli, Pope, Lenin, and Christ seem "irrelevant" to modern management gurus, perhaps students of management will benefit from their present examination of Japanese management. I'm prepared to give that examination my attention, but I suspect that their conclusions from this, too, will take me back to the great humanists.

I'm fully aware that I am not in the mainstream in my views and that my comments suggest arrogance. It is reassuring to me, therefore, to tell about an incident that took place about three years ago. I was then teaching a German history course at West Point; late in the course I invited a German Army Attache to speak to my students about the Bundeswehr. I already admired the man, but was surprised and delighted at his response when a cadet asked his opinion of what constituted the best education for a prospective military leader. "The humanities," responded the Attache, "particularly for combat arms officers." Those are my views, too.

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