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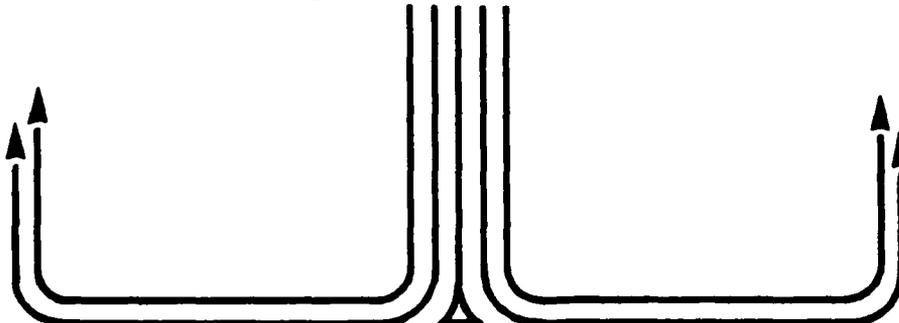
AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

STUDENT REPORT

EVERY SUPERVISOR'S MISSION:
BUILD TOMORROW'S LEADERS

MAJOR DAVID E. RENNEKAMP 86-2105

"insights into tomorrow"



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REPORT NUMBER 86-2105

TITLE EVERY SUPERVISOR'S MISSION: BUILD TOMORROW'S LEADERS

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
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A principal duty of every Air Force supervisor is to train subordinates for future leadership roles. The article explains why this often neglected duty is important, especially during peacetime. In addition, it offers a number of practical techniques supervisors can use daily to help develop each subordinate's leadership potential.			
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PREFACE

This manuscript is an article for publication. It was written to satisfy the ACSC research project requirements.

The article tries to convince Air Force supervisors to expand their efforts to train subordinates for future leadership roles. Motivation towards this goal is provided through a discussion of the importance of subordinate leadership development, and a description of the personal fulfillment one can obtain through such efforts. The article also shows how to go about accomplishing this task. This is done in a section covering practical techniques supervisors can use every day to help develop leadership in each of their subordinates.

This article will be submitted to the managers of the Air Force Supervisor's Course for inclusion in their curriculum material. In addition, a shortened version of the article will be submitted for publication in *Airman* magazine.

Conventions of format and style used in the attached manuscript are not the standard ACSC research project conventions. The general guide for preparing the manuscript was Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. The documentation system is defined in *The Chicago Manual of Style* ("Notes" method, chapter 17). Other differences from ACSC conventions include writing in the first person and double spacing.

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**EVERY SUPERVISOR'S MISSION:
BUILD TOMORROW'S LEADERS**

Prologue

The bright winter sun sank deeper in the cold western sky. From his seat in the retirements and separations waiting area, Colonel Adams could watch the late afternoon sunset through the uncurtained windows. He compared his career to the setting sun: for in a few more minutes they would both be officially retired.

Chief Master Sergeant Hart, also completing his retirement outprocessing, sat down in the chair next to Colonel Adams. Chief Hart noted the pensive expression on Colonel Adams' face. "Colonel, are you wondering if it's been worth the effort?"

Colonel Adams had known Chief Hart pretty well for the last three years. They had been honored together at a joint retirement ceremony the previous day. He knew exactly what the chief was asking.

"Sure, it's been worth it; it's been a terrific career," said Colonel Adams. "A lot of work, maybe; but I've enjoyed most of it, and I'd like to think I've made some worthwhile contributions.

You've made some important contributions yourself. But look at that sun. It's been bright all day. Yet it'll soon be giving us only twilight, then nothing at all. I guess I was just feeling for a moment that our careers are like that. The impact we've made will soon be just twilight, then that will fade and the Air Force will forget us entirely."

Chief Hart replied right away. "Sir, I disagree. The Air Force is people, and I'm sure I've made an impact on some people they won't forget for a long time."

Colonel Adams had always liked Chief Hart's lack of modesty. "As usual, Chief, you're right. I can think of a few troops who may *never* forget you! Who knows--they may even become chiefs themselves someday because of the things you've helped them learn."

Chief Hart paused for a moment. Then he said, "Thanks, sir. A few of them *will* become chiefs. I've pointed them in the right direction and they'll succeed. I didn't know much when I was a young airman, but my NCOs pushed me and I grew. So I've tried to remember to push my airman, and sure enough they grew too. I know you think about pushing your people. Look at Major Wilk. When you gave him command of the maintenance squadron, I thought, with all due respect, that you were nuts. But you pushed him and coached him, and I have to admit that after a slightly rough start, he's turned out to be a first class commander. You know.

I'm confident about the future. We're leaving a lot of good leaders here. If we go to war tomorrow, they can hack it. I suppose that training future leaders has been one of the more important things we've done."

"Well, Chief," said Colonel Adams. "I always figured it was a good idea to train my subordinates; so they could replace me when I got the chance to move up to the next rung. But maybe it's even more important than I thought. Maybe the real mission of a peacetime Air Force is simply to train tomorrow's leaders. Isn't it ironic that the 'big picture' is finally becoming clear on the day we're retiring!"

The Importance of Leadership Development

With great leadership, great goals can be realized. In a military organization, this strong leadership needs to be exercised at every level from the very top on down to the front-line supervisor. If you are a supervisor, you are helping provide that leadership now. But you aren't immortal. When you retire, or for that matter when you next change jobs, what will you leave behind? Will you leave only an impressive array of soon-to-be forgotten personal accomplishments? Or will you also leave subordinates ready to assume tomorrow's leadership?

General of the Army Omar Bradley said, "An essential qualification of a good leader is the ability to recognize, select and train junior leaders." All of us who supervise need to think about this particular aspect of our mission, and pay more attention to developing leadership qualities in our subordinates. Not only will this better prepare the Air Force for the future, it will also give us a much greater sense of contribution during our careers.

Think of the people you know who are effective leaders in today's Air Force, then think what they were like when they were airmen or second lieutenants. Certainly they bumbled through

their share of mistakes and embarrassments. But they learned their jobs and acquired leadership qualities along the way. If you ask them, they could undoubtedly tell you which of their supervisors influenced them and helped them grow. We owe a debt to those particular supervisors. They supported the mission of developing leadership qualities in their subordinates.

While this mission has always been important, it has received renewed interest in recent years, particularly in the Air Force and Army. A 1983 *TIG Brief* inspection guide, designed to evaluate unit leadership, asks, "Are commanders and supervisors developing the potential in subordinates for future leadership roles?"² The 1983 revision to Army Field Manual 22-100, *Military Leadership*, discusses "What a Leader Must Know." Among the items is "How to teach and train others to become good leaders."³

This mission is important to supervisors at every level, even junior enlisted supervisors. For example, a March-April 1985 *Army Logistician* article listed the "Ten Commandments" for quality motor sergeants. Commandment Eight said, "He identifies subordinates with leadership potential and sees that they get the training needed to advance."⁴

Air Force Chief of Staff General Gabriel summed up the issue in his introduction to the September 1985 AFF 35-49, *Air Force Leadership*:

Those of us in leadership positions have a special responsibility to develop and support the high quality people who will lead the Air Force in the 21st century. I challenge each of you to prepare yourself for leadership, and to take the time to teach those who will follow you.*

Check yourself. If you're not actively developing leadership qualities in your subordinates, you're not a good leader. You're not accomplishing your mission.

Of course, you're not alone if you're one of the Air Force supervisors who hasn't been working to develop leadership in your subordinates. Our neglect of this mission has been shown in the Organizational Assessment Package (OAP). The OAP, a 109-question survey, has been given to 89,200 randomly selected Air Force members. Among many findings, OAP results show that almost half of the officers and enlisted surveyed felt that they "were not being prepared to accept increased responsibility [leadership] to the extent they would prefer."* In AFF 36-23, *Officer Career Development*, we find, "In the final analysis, supervisors constitute the driving force behind officer career development."7 Of course, this same relationship applies to enlisted people. Therefore, if officer and enlisted subordinates feel they're not being prepared for leadership, supervisors must shoulder a significant portion of the blame. We need to do a better job of developing leadership qualities in our subordinates. And we need to do it now, during peacetime, so that the necessary leadership will be there if we ever need it in wartime.

A personal incident convinced me of the importance of developing leadership in my subordinates. Some years ago I left a job where I thought I'd done very well. My unit had been quite successful, and I was proud that my personal imprint was left on every accomplishment and improvement we'd made. A close friend told me that after I left things went rapidly downhill. I was disappointed to hear that. I jokingly told my friend that maybe I could take comfort in believing that I'd contributed to good leadership when I was there, because they fell apart after I left. My observant friend pointed out that I had been no leader at all. He said I had done everything myself and neglected to develop leadership qualities in my subordinates. He may not have been polite, but he was right.

I didn't like it when my friend first pointed out my deficiencies as a leader. Nobody ever told me that to be a good leader I had to develop leadership qualities in others. A lot of questions popped into my head: What are leadership qualities? Aren't leaders just born with them? How do I know which subordinates are capable of becoming leaders? Doesn't PME (Professional Military Education) handle leadership development? What can I do to develop leadership qualities in my subordinates? Don't I already have enough to do? My friend opened a whole confusing world to me by presenting this unwelcome new idea. Yet I thought of the words of British Field Marshal Lord Wavell. "The ideal officer should be afraid of nothing, not even a new

idea."* Begrudgingly, I decided to give the idea a chance by finding answers to my questions.

My investigation, in retrospect, has proven much more valuable than I expected. I intend to share with you some of the answers I found. Perhaps you will also find some answers of your own, and resolve to better develop your own subordinates.

Answers To Leadership Development Questions

Most of the questions I asked myself turned out to be reasonably easy to answer. Let me deal first with these.

*** What are leadership qualities?**

Every base library has thick volumes dealing with the theory of leadership and leadership qualities. And there seem to be as many lists of leadership qualities as there are publications dealing with leadership. None of the lists really nail down a set of qualities that will absolutely guarantee leadership success. Yet all of the lists display a degree of commonality and cite undeniably useful leadership traits. For our purposes, I've simply selected a dozen items that the experts frequently mention in one form or another:

1. Professional and job knowledge
2. Self-esteem
3. Character and ethics

4. Interest in innovation and willingness to take risks
5. Oral and written communication skills
6. Self-discipline
7. Health and physical fitness
8. Commitment
9. Ability to teach
10. Ability to judge others
11. Decision making skill
12. Acceptance of responsibility

Think of the military leaders you have known, particularly the ones you most admired. They probably possessed quite a few of these 12 qualities. You may also think of other qualities you consider important. Make your own list and keep it handy. The point is that there are at least some qualities that can be defined, and you have to know what they are if you're going to try to develop them in your subordinates.

*** Aren't leaders just born with them (leadership qualities)?**

Surprisingly, almost all of the experts I could find were in agreement with each another on this interesting question. Some people obviously have a greater potential than others for developing leadership qualities, but the consensus is that no one is really born with them.

Dr. Richard Lester, a respected educator serving with Air University's Leadership and Management Development Center, writes, "Much the same as lawyers, writers, test pilots, or engineers, leaders are made--not born. People can develop and learn leadership just as they learn any other complex skill, but the learning process requires intensive effort, study, and continuing application." Dr. Lester goes on to point out, "General Daniel 'Chappie' James, Jr., former Commander, Aerospace Defense Command, was a firm advocate of the principle that leaders can be trained. He often said that the military must search out latent talent and then train it to its full potential if it expects to develop effective leaders."¹⁰

Other military leaders expressed similar sentiments. Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman said, "I have read of men born as generals peculiarly endowed by nature but have never seen one."¹¹ Former Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis E. LeMay said, "I'm firmly convinced that leaders are not born; they're educated, trained, and made, as in every other profession."¹² In *Air Power Historian*, Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker remarked, "There is an interesting phenomenon about leadership. One does not seem to inherit its propensities or qualities. It seems to be an art that is acquired."¹³ All of these men serve to debunk the popular myth that there exists among us a given number of born leaders. In fact, military academies, NCO leadership schools, and other formal programs have leadership

development as their central purpose. If leaders were born, not made, these institutions would be unnecessary.

Okay, it seems that people are not just born as leaders, but some are born with the potential to become leaders if properly developed. This leads directly to my next question.

*** How do I know which subordinates are capable of becoming leaders?**

Not everyone can become a truly inspirational leader, but I think it's important to mention first that every Air Force member has at least *some* potential for leadership. Every member is now a high school graduate, every member has qualified for entrance into the Air Force, and so every member has at least demonstrated possession of the basic intelligence and maturity needed to become a leader. The Air Force needs thousands of people with leadership qualities, at every level of supervision, so we must remember to give everyone we supervise at least a little bit of leadership development attention. This applies even to those who don't seem too promising. Remember that one of our nation's most important military leaders, General Ulysses S. Grant, started out as a short, shy, unmotivated boy who experienced serious disciplinary problems and countless failures throughout his early career.¹⁴ Luckily, he finally received some opportunities to develop his leadership and his potential blossomed.

Of course, those of you with a great number of subordinates need a yardstick to measure relative leadership potential, so you can concentrate your efforts on the best candidates. I suggest you consider these four indicators in deciding which subordinates will receive the greatest attention:

1. Choose those who exhibit informal leadership among their peers. Those who can influence others, even if it's a negative influence, have potential. This is not exactly the same as popularity. Look for those who are willing to take a firm stand against their peers on occasion.

2. Potential leaders are often creative. Look for those who have the new ideas first or at least are first to accept promising new ideas. Remember aviation pioneer Air Marshall Giulio Douhet's words, "Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur."¹⁸

3. Look for those with natural confidence. Not smugness or egocentricity, but a persistent attitude of knowing they'll succeed in the things they consider important. Major Michael A. Rosebush, assigned to the Air Force Academy's Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, wrote, "Some prominent psychologists believe that if you have to look at only one factor to try to predict whether a person will be successful or not, you should look at their self-esteem.... Self-esteem is one of the

primary human drives and has an extraordinary impact on a person's performance."¹⁶

4. Select those with superior job performance. Air Force tradition and officer/enlisted promotion systems have long held that current job performance is one of the best measures of potential for increased responsibility and leadership.

These four indicators, along with common sense, will usually tell you who deserves the greatest efforts at developing leadership qualities. But remember that every subordinate deserves at least some of your efforts because every one of them can provide future leadership at some level.

*** Doesn't PME handle leadership development?**

PME handles some, but not all, leadership development. A look at the *Air University Catalog* shows that every officer and enlisted PME course contains a healthy dose of leadership education.¹⁷ But this education is generally theoretical: derived from lectures, seminars, and readings.

It makes sense that good leadership development also requires a great deal of practice to gain the necessary qualities. By necessity, most of that practice will have to take place in the job environment--not in a PME course. Efforts to build leadership qualities will certainly be more productive if conducted under the

supervision of a tutor. You, the supervisor, are the only practical person to be that tutor.

*** Don't I already have enough to do?**

It seems that there's never enough time available to do all the things that need to be done. An effort to develop leadership qualities in our subordinates will consume additional precious time. But keep three things in mind. First, some efforts, such as effective delegation (discussed later), will actually save time in the long run. Second, consistent efforts to develop leadership qualities in subordinates will remind us to work on our own leadership qualities and promote our own growth. Finally, every supervisor could undoubtedly make some time by eliminating tasks that will prove less important in future years than developing leadership qualities.

Scrutinize your daily schedule. Resolve to make time for subordinate leadership development by eliminating some low-impact tasks or by avoiding the time-consuming pursuit of absolute perfection in minor tasks. A good idea would be to develop the habit of at least *thinking* about subordinate leadership development once every day at a regular time, such as right after lunch. If you can remember once a day to ask yourself what you've done to develop your subordinates, it will help you take advantage of good opportunities as they arise.

How To Develop A Subordinate's Leadership

You may have noticed that I temporarily skipped the crucial question "What can I do to develop leadership qualities in my subordinates?" This question is really the nucleus of the entire issue. I'll now try to answer this question by presenting some suggestions which I believe are practical for typical peacetime Air Force supervisors. This list is certainly not all inclusive, nor does it apply equally to all ranks or situations. Some of the suggestions may seem more appropriate for commanders than supervisors, although supervisors can modify the suggestions to make them useful. Hopefully, the list will at least provide a starting point to get you thinking about how you can develop your particular subordinates.

1. Match duties to leadership development needs.

When we assign tasks, we naturally attempt to match the tasks with individuals who have the appropriate talents. But to enhance leadership qualities, we should sometimes match tasks with individuals who do not have the appropriate talents. This will help them develop those talents. For example, an individual without a proven ability to judge others or a good knowledge of all the unit's activities could be assigned to perform the self-inspection for another section of the unit.

This not only sounds risky, it is risky! But consider the question posed in Air University's *Guidelines for Command* pamphlet: "Are you willing to take reasonable risks to allow your subordinates to grow and become more productive?"¹⁰ Wouldn't it be foolish, especially in a peacetime Air Force, not to take these reasonable risks? Let your subordinates tread new water and make the mistakes they can learn from, in peacetime, so that they will be better prepared to lead in the future, if war ever comes.

There are many more examples along the same line. If you need to nominate someone to fill a vacancy on a base advisory council, you may want to select someone with leadership potential but without a demonstrated commitment to Air Force goals. If a task arises that will require close coordination with other units, you could assign it to a person who hasn't shown keen communication skills. Perhaps you could simply rearrange job duties within your unit at reasonable intervals to increase everyone's breadth of job knowledge.

Of course, when you assign new duties like this, you need to be able and willing to train your subordinates in their new tasks. And be sure to let the subordinate know what leadership qualities you aim to improve. See if this doesn't motivate them to put forth a considerable effort to master those qualities.

2. Delegate authority and responsibility.

No matter how good you are, you can't do everything yourself--nor should you. The well-known benefits of delegation include time saving for the supervisor and the increased initiative of decentralization. A less well-known benefit is leadership development of subordinates. Dr. Richard Laster, quoted above, writes, "Leaders must delegate tasks which require their people to make decisions."¹⁹ General Omar Bradley said, "There is no better way to develop a person's leadership than to give him a job involving responsibility and let him work it out."²⁰ Notice General Bradley's advice to "let him work it out." This is essential in delegation. The venerable General George S. Patton, Jr., explained this when he said, "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."²¹

Look at your own tasks. Couldn't you delegate some things to your subordinates? For example, delegate the task of building monthly unit duty schedules. If you delegate this to various subordinates on a rotating basis, they will each increase their understanding of how the unit operates and get the opportunity to innovate.

Whatever you delegate, be sure you let your people know they will be personally responsible for the task and the results. I've heard, "You can delegate authority but not responsibility."

Technically, this is true. That's why delegation of responsibility can be risky--your boss will still hold you accountable if the delegated activity results in a failure. Nevertheless, if you want to develop leadership qualities in your subordinates, you must still tell them they are responsible for the activity you delegated. Just as your boss decided what level of activity could be delegated to you with a reasonable chance of success, you must make the same judgment in relation to your subordinates. They must be held responsible if they fail, and likewise they must be given credit if they are successful. Let them know you are available to help guide them, but you will not overrule their reasonable decisions. Another quote from *Guidelines for Command*: "Give people responsibility: they will like it and respond.... Most people produce more when they know they are responsible for their actions."²²

3. Conduct formal periodic counselings.

The commander of the best led squadron I've ever known conducted formal half-hour individual counseling sessions every six months with every member of the squadron. The counselings provided an ideal forum for discussion of each individual's job performance, career plans, and leadership development. Each person received a lot of praise for their strengths and a brutally honest review of the areas where they could improve. But the

overall experience was upbeat and I know of no one in the squadron who considered it a waste of time.

Every supervisor can likewise promote leadership development of their subordinates through periodic counselings. Schedule them far in advance on a routine basis and prepare for them individually. Consider these suggestions in conducting counselings:

A. Use the appropriate DER/APR rating form as a discussion guide for a portion of the counseling. Mention things the subordinate has done that demonstrate the mastery or lack of mastery of the performance factors listed. (Note that the performance factors are closely related to leadership qualities.) Ask the subordinate for comments as you go and for ideas on how to improve the weaker areas. Incidentally, reassure the subordinate that when you complete the written form at the end of the rating period you will concentrate your comments on the individual's strengths!

B. Discuss the subordinate's career plans. Ensure they are realistic and take into account increasing levels of responsibility. Make the individual set firm dates for completion of the next level PME (and follow up on the progress of this effort). Encourage off-duty education in applicable fields that will expand job knowledge or increase leadership education (management, history, psychology, communications, and so on).

C. Describe to the individual the impressions he or she presents to others. Try to be non-judgmental. Be tactful yet honest. Does he or she appear sloppy or neat? Quiet or talkative? Aggressive or laid-back? Barely in compliance or totally committed? Many people harbor amazing inaccuracies in what they believe others think about them. They can't be good leaders unless they understand how others see them. Ask for feedback about whether they agree with the impressions they give. Explain the concept developed by management consultant Rick Tate: "Look upon each and every situation that you're in as an opportunity to make a statement [an impression].... You will make a statement anyhow, so make it consciously."²³

D. Briefly question the subordinate about health and safety concerns. Check for the subordinate's personal satisfaction with diet, smoking and alcohol, exercise, and general health practices. Ask whether the subordinate feels Air Force personal and job safety standards are reasonable and well implemented. You don't need to lecture on all these topics. You just need to show your concern and prod the subordinate into being concerned. Subordinates can't become good leaders and remain good leaders unless they take care of their health. Remember that Napoleon never lost a battle until Waterloo, where he was a sick man.²⁴

E. Try to enhance the subordinate's sense of commitment by discussing things such as the subordinate's impression of how well the unit is accomplishing its mission. Ask what the subordinate likes or dislikes about military life, life in the dorms, family adjustments, or whatever seems appropriate. For example, ask what the subordinate believes about why some military members use drugs. (You may be surprised what you learn.) By soliciting personal opinions about these and other current issues, you can hopefully get the subordinate to realize his or her own influence over these things. You may even obtain an agreement from the subordinate to try to improve some of them.

F. Be certain that you end the counseling on a positive note. Point out the importance of the unit's mission and the contribution of the individual to that mission. Mention the subordinate's growth in leadership qualities. Be clear about what you expect of the subordinate during the next several months. Build the subordinate's self-esteem by expressing your confidence that the subordinate will succeed.

If you accept the challenge to effectively conduct well-planned periodic counselings with each subordinate, you both will inevitably come away with an increased commitment to leadership development.

4. Assign individual communication exercises.

I've always felt that one of the most admired leadership abilities is the talent to get up and speak convincingly before a group. Effective writing is similarly an ability that can sway followers and build respect. These skills have always enhanced any effort to lead, whether in business, government, or the military. In the pioneering business textbook *The Function of the Executive*, Chester Barnard concluded that communication is the main task of organizational leaders.²⁶ Benjamin Disraeli, the often quoted prime minister of Great Britain, said, "Men govern with words."²⁶ In 1917, Major C. A. Bach delivered to a class of newly commissioned Army officers one of the most famous addresses ever given on military leadership. He included, "Not only must the officer know, but he must be able to put what he knows into grammatical, interesting, forceful English."²⁷

It's important to plant seeds in your subordinates that will start growing into a polished ability to communicate. You can plant these seeds by having your subordinates practice communicating. Contrary to popular opinion, noted speakers and writers usually claim that it took years of practice to develop their skills. Simple communication exercises can go a long way towards helping develop these skills in your subordinates.

A good example of a communication exercise is found in Army Field Manual 22-100. The manual describes a technique that

enhances communication skills while helping Army squad leaders make sure their troops conduct thorough inspections ("motor stables") of their vehicles daily:

Each day the squad leaders assign a different squad member to be in charge of motor stables. Tell him one week in advance. Tell him he will give a 10- to 15-minute class and demonstration on an aspect of the vehicle. He will then supervise the maintenance checks on the entire vehicle. The squad leader's job is to provide overall supervision, to observe, to coach, to critique, and to ensure proper maintenance. At the end of the maintenance session, the squad leader leads a feedback session in which each soldier in the squad gives honest, respectful feedback to the soldier who led the session. The squad leader must ensure that the feedback, while honest, does not overwhelm and discourage the soldier. The feedback focuses on leadership attributes that were demonstrated.

This same program will work equally well for any kind of weapons or equipment maintenance. It is also applicable to training. It involves all soldiers in the squad and develops leadership in them--capabilities that they may not have known they had.²⁰

This kind of exercise could easily be adapted to Air Force group requirements, such as the ones directing periodic inspections of flight simulators or ground equipment.

Another suggestion would be to assign a subordinate the task of presenting a speech at your training meeting or commander's call. Commanders are nearly always happy to include such presentations, so long as you make sure your subordinate will keep it *short* (3-5 minutes). The speech could cover a new regulation, an article from a professional publication, a safety procedure, or any other topic of interest to the group. Critique the speech

afterward. If you're not a good public speaker yourself, find someone who is. You'll probably have no trouble convincing that person to help you critique your subordinate.

Also include practice on written communication. Assign subordinates to draft letters or memos on some of the subjects you would normally handle yourself, such as requests for support, local procedures, unit histories, or recommendations for awards. Critique each effort, not on the basis of how you would have written it, but on whether the meaning was clear and the point got across. Also critique faulty grammar. Virtually every prominent leader makes an effort to follow the common rules of grammar. Then instruct your subordinate to rewrite and correct the paper, with the help of peers if necessary, until it is reasonably good.

The main item to emphasize in any communication exercise is to make the meaning clear--to get the point across. Don't let your subordinates make the practice difficult by trying to use fancy words or eloquent theatrics. Many strong leaders have a knack for effective brevity. In John Wayne's larger-than-life portrayals of frontier leaders, he seemed to get the whole plan across by saying, "Saddle up!"²⁹ General Patton got terrific results by saying, "Follow me."³⁰ Others used more words, but still concentrated on making the meaning clear. Abraham Lincoln might be surprised to hear that some of his speeches have come to be

considered great literature. He claimed that he sought only to be understood, and to convince.³¹

It's impossible to overestimate the value of practice, through exercises such as those just listed, in developing the communication skills vital to leadership.

5. Create an atmosphere that fosters leadership development.

A good supervisor can set a positive atmosphere in the unit that will continuously promote leadership development. Look at your own unit and see if you've created the right atmosphere. Do you insist on high standards and integrity? Do you reward superior performance? Do you routinely build your subordinates' self-confidence, and remind them of your faith that they will continue to improve? Do you maintain a unit "read file" to help expand each person's professional and job knowledge, and do you make sure they each review it periodically? Do you encourage your subordinates' professional reading program by letting them occasionally see you with a good book under your arm? Do you let your subordinates know they are responsible for policing each other? Do you encourage sports and conditioning programs? If you can answer "yes" to most of these questions, you're promoting leadership development.

However, a particularly important ingredient to creating the right atmosphere is to make sure your subordinates know that you

welcome new ideas. Beware of the slogan. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." This slogan should apply to hardware, not ideas. If you apply it to ideas, you trample initiative. Former Secretary of the Air Force Verne Orr said:

Some of our best ideas come from the first level of supervision, but many of them die there, no doubt because they threaten the stability and security of established supervisors. While change for change's sake may be dangerous, the greater danger is in refusal to accept change.³²

Do you nurture those subordinates who show creativity, and do you implement their more reasonable suggestions as often as you can? Do you admonish your subordinates not to complain, but to present a better idea and a willingness to do something about it? Do you allow your subordinates the freedom to experiment and to make mistakes they can learn from? General Omar Bradley gave his opinion on this subject when he said:

I would recommend to all commanders that they inform the members of their staffs that anyone who does not disagree once in a while with what is about to be done is of limited value and should probably be shifted to some other place where he might occasionally have an idea.³³

6. Become a mentor for a promising subordinate.

A mentor selects the most promising subordinate and says, "I will teach you every secret I know and give you every opportunity to perform because I believe that you could someday hold a position of considerable importance." A classic example of the

mentor/subordinate relationship included General Fox Connor and Dwight Eisenhower. As a young Army officer Dwight Eisenhower worked for General Connor in Panama. After Eisenhower retired, he wrote:

Life with General Connor was a sort of graduate school in military affairs and the humanities, leavened by a man who was experienced in his knowledge of men and their conduct. I can never adequately express my gratitude to this one gentleman.... In a lifetime of association with great and good men, he is the one more or less invisible figure to whom I owe an incalculable debt.³⁴

This example of mentor/subordinate effect has been repeated countless times at various levels of rank in military life. The subordinate often becomes known as the protégé of the mentor, especially if the mentor is a high ranking individual. But the system works just as well between a seasoned staff sergeant and a bright young airman.

Nevertheless, there are things you need to be aware of with this technique. Be sensitive that some people dislike the mentor/subordinate relationship and consider it a case of unfair favoritism. If you decide to assume a genuine mentor role for an officer or enlisted subordinate, make sure the subordinate has exceptional potential so that you can fairly dismiss accusations of this kind of favoritism. Attention to this touchy point can be seen in an article from *The Changing World of the American Military*. The authors say, "Commanders of Air Force Systems

Command--Generals Ferguson and Phillips--were products of General Schriever's attention to subordinate development." The authors then hasten to add, "Although these military leaders benefited from the Air Force's protégé tradition, each was a distinct innovator, philosopher, and leader in his own right."³⁸

The other consideration in a mentor/subordinate relationship is personal risk. According to *Harvard Business Review*:

Mentors take risks with people. They bet initially on talent they perceive in younger people. Mentors also risk emotional involvement in working closely with their juniors. The risks do not always pay off, but the willingness to take them appears crucial in developing leaders.³⁹

Whether you decide to go all out to establish a true mentor/subordinate relationship, or just apply a low-key portion of the system to a few above-average subordinates, I think we can agree that the effort is crucial if we are to develop exceptional leaders.

7. Get involved in your subordinate's next assignment.

AFMPC must often make assignments based only on somewhat impersonal records. Young people often state assignment preferences based only on the advice of their equally inexperienced peers. Help these people, preferably before your subordinate enters the next assignment cycle.

For a subordinate that is really ready for increased responsibility, place an AUTOVON call to let the career manager know that your recommendations on the APR/OER aren't just window dressing. Get your boss to help if you feel strongly. Talk to your contacts at other bases to see if they know of an appropriate position opening, and convince whoever owns that position to ask for your subordinate. If a good opportunity opens out of cycle, see if you can figure a way to release your sharp subordinate early.

Talk to all your subordinates about the things that are important in a job other than geography. Make sure they know about the growth and satisfaction available in supervisory and command positions. If they haven't been in the Air Force too long, encourage them to apply for a position as an instructor in ATC or anywhere else appropriate. The important leadership qualities a young person can master quickly in an instructor role need to be more widely recognized. Five of our last six Chiefs of Staff and at least four of our last seven Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force served as instructors in their early careers.³⁷

Try to work harder on your subordinates' assignments than you do on your own. Keep in mind the idea that without the supervisor's involvement, there is no system the Air Force could devise that would adequately match the potential talents of our

best individuals with the responsible positions that foster growth.

8. Lead by example.

I saved the best for last. Although this is an indirect technique, military tradition holds that leading by example and being a good role model is one of the best techniques for developing leadership in subordinates. Many capable people are not motivated to try to become a leader until they meet a good leadership role model. You need to be that good leadership role model. This is especially important in a subordinate's early years. During this impressionable period the subordinate's peers are also new: their supervisor represents the "Official Air Force." Thus the supervisor automatically serves as a role model and exerts great influence (hopefully a positive influence).

Subordinates may sometimes not be able to live up to your high example due to immaturity or lack of talent. But you can be sure they'll have no problems copying your bad example. *Guidelines for Command* states, "If you are irregular in your habits--late for appointments, careless about facts, bored in attitude--your people will follow your lead."³⁰

Evaluate whether you are leading by example with this question: Do my subordinates respect my integrity and ability?

If you are not sure whether they do, you may need to adjust your standards, improve your capabilities, or both.

These eight general techniques are dedicated to the principle that supervisors in typical peacetime Air Force units can have a significant impact on developing leadership qualities of subordinates. Use these techniques if you can, or be creative and invent your own techniques. Either way, you and your subordinates will be on the road to leadership development.

Personal Sense of Contribution

For more than a decade our Air Force has been essentially a peacetime Air Force. We have had our jobs to do--to maintain deterrence and to prepare for armed conflict. However, it is entirely possible that we may serve the remainder of our careers without ever participating in armed conflict. I presume you hope this will be the case: that deterrence will continue to succeed. But unlike victory in combat, successful deterrence alone cannot always provide us with the certain conviction that our personal contributions really made any difference. However, we *can* obtain this certain conviction if we know that we prepared our subordinates for the leadership to win wars after we are gone.

This leadership will not grow overnight. According to *The Changing World of the American Military*, "Of particular importance

is the obligation of present leaders to keep their successors in mind as they perform their everyday jobs.... Trained manpower is probably the military's longest 'lead-time' item."³⁹ Therefore, we must make efforts now to prepare our subordinates for leadership if we want any personal long-term impact.

The flights we've flown, the papers we've pushed, the machines we've made, and the policies we've pursued will be forgotten or made obsolete by future generations. Don't take the chance that *all* your efforts will be forgotten. Make a commitment now to develop leadership qualities in your subordinates. Resolve to think about this issue at least once every day. Resolve to take some action on this issue, however minor, every time you can. Commit yourself now to the concept that every supervisor's ultimate mission is to build tomorrow's leaders.

Epilogue

"Colonel Adams, Chief Hart..." called the airman. The soon-to-be retirees walked up to the counter. "Sirs, if you'll sign these papers you'll both be done."

They each signed their respective documents and accepted the airman's congratulations. Colonel Adams put his copies in the maroon briefcase his wife had given him when he was promoted to colonel. He clicked it shut gently. Chief Hart folded his copies in half and slipped them into the vinyl steno pad folder with the faded wing decal. He'd been carrying that familiar folder in his left hand for almost six years now.

Chief Hart smiled at the airman and said, "By the way, your shirt pocket is unbuttoned."

Colonel Adams wondered how Chief Hart always seemed to notice these things. The airman's face flushed a bit in embarrassment. He quickly buttoned the recalcitrant pocket flap and then stood up straight. "Sorry, sir," he said sheepishly.

The colonel and the chief each put on their blue Air Force overcoats, possibly for the last time, then walked out the door together. They proceeded silently towards the parking lot. As

they walked, they each reached into their right coat pocket to extract their keys, then instinctively transferred the keys to their left hand, even though that hand was already occupied. They reached the colonel's car first, the chief's was just a few steps farther. They stopped and fidgeted and looked away from each other for a moment.

Colonel Adams spoke first. "Chief, I suppose this is it. I want to thank you personally for the work you've done, especially for helping the people who will carry on after us. God's speed to you." The colonel reached out to shake Chief Hart's hand, but Chief Hart pulled up his arm in a sharp salute. Colonel Adams returned the salute, held it a few seconds, dropped it and then the two men shook hands firmly.

"Thanks," replied Chief Hart. "You're a tremendous officer and I've considered it a pleasure to serve with you, Colonel. You know, the sun's gone, the twilight's about gone, and I guess we'd have to say we're about gone too--*but they'll never forget us!*" The two men grinned at each other, then turned and parted.

Notes

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