

FINDING THE RIGHT LEADERS FOR THE TEAM

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

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It is important to get the right leaders on your team to ensure that your team is functioning efficiently and effectively. I will cover the leader competencies that are important to the team. Leader attributes are also determining factors for choosing subordinate leaders for the team. My project will also address the servant leader qualities and how a servant leader will benefit the team. Toxic leaders have an impact on the team. I will address how to avoid toxic leaders and how to deal with toxic leaders who are already on the team. Having a great team not only improves performance, but also makes people want to come to work.

FINDING THE RIGHT LEADERS FOR THE TEAM

Having the right people on the team allows the team to be successful regardless of the mission of that team. “The executives who ignited the transformations from good to great did not first figure out where to drive the bus and then get people to take it there. No, they *first* got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and *then* figured out where to drive it.”¹ Finding the best qualities for leaders, identifying servant leader’s and toxic leader’s qualities, and knowing the impacts of these qualities on the organization will help to determine the right leaders for the team.

Why is it Important to have the Right Leaders on the Team?

Talent and good academics are not the only qualities that are important for an individual to contribute to the team’s effort. Attitude has a great impact on the team and the mission. An individual’s goals can impact his contribution to the team either positively or negatively. Trust is a quality of the team and also a product from the team. The benefits from having the right leaders on the team are more than just productivity.

Talent is easy to determine from leaders’ backgrounds, education and experiences. But it is much more difficult to find out the attitudes of these leaders until they are interacting with the team. Talent revolves around technical skills and education. Attitude revolves around personalities and the spirit of cooperation. Talent can be taught to leaders with the right attitude for the team. Attitude is part of the personality traits of the leaders and is very difficult to change this dynamic in a leader. So it is better to find a leader with the right attitude for the team and less talent than the other way around.

Leaders have goals for themselves and organizations have goals too. It is important how the leader integrates the two sets of goals. When the leaders set the team's goals above their own, they are committed to the mission of the organization. When the leaders' goals are woven into the team's goals, the leaders are committed to the team and its members as well as the mission. Finding the leaders that can balance personal goals with the organizational goals and people with the mission is difficult, but well worth the search.

“When it comes to trust, the only passing grade is 100 percent. If people can't trust you all of the time, then they consider you untrustworthy.”² The leaders need to have the ability to not only establish trust, but to grow it, to extend it, to restore it with all of the people and organizations inside and outside of the team that the team interacts with.³ Trust is important for the individual, but how they establish trust for the organization determines the leaders' abilities to develop relationships within the team and with external organizations as well.

What are the Individual Qualities to Look for in a Leader?

Many of the important qualities that a leader should possess are difficult to measure and sometimes difficult to recognize in an interview. The Army provides a list of qualities for leaders called Leader Competencies and Leader Attributes. Leader competencies describe what a leader does. Leader attributes tell us what the leader is. Servant leaders are focused on the team and the individuals that comprise the team. Unfortunately, some leaders are toxic leaders and destroy the team, its cohesiveness, and the output of the team. The team will thrive if these good qualities are identified and developed in each individual and the toxic qualities are identified and eliminated.

Leader Competencies

Leader competencies are roles, functions and activities of the leader. The competencies are defined in three main categories: leading, developing, and achieving. Leaders establish their styles by the way they approach each of these categories. It is difficult to assess the competencies until the leader is actually performing a leadership role. Subordinates are often the best sources to determine the level of performance of these competencies.

Leading

The first competency for strategic leaders is leading. Leading can be defined by leading others, the ability to influence the team members, leading by example and communicating.

Leading others is the first part of leading. The two components that we will consider for this competency are balancing requirements of the mission with the welfare of the followers and maintaining and enforcing high professional standards.⁴ Without this competency the leader may be able to do many things alone, but the team would not accomplish its mission.

Leaders invest power in others. They find the right people, train them and delegate the power and authority to them. It is not easy at first and takes time to operate efficiently. The growing process is rewarding to the leaders and the subordinates. The organization benefits in the long run and future senior leaders are being developed in the process of delegation of power.⁵

In this competency, he maintains and enforces high professional standards in the organization. He recognizes the importance of addressing any values or performance

issues that do not meet the standard. If substandard performance is tolerated, it becomes a morale issue with the organization as well as impacting the mission accomplishment. So, the strategic leader needs to hold the team to the standards. Leading others is only one part of leading.⁶

The **ability to influence** is the second part to being able to lead. This influence will determine the limits that the leader can reach. The ability to influence shows the understanding of the situation and all of the parties involved in making decisions regarding that situation. Once the leader assesses the situation and determines the key decision makers, then he must be able to build relationships with those individuals, agencies and teams. The relationship must have the foundation of trust in the leader. Then the leader is able to negotiate with those key decision makers because of the partnerships that he built and the trust that he established. His negotiating skills will impact the mission in the direction that he has set. These outside areas of influence are vital for his team to accomplish their missions and open many avenues for future relationships and other areas of influence.⁷

The strategic leader sets the standards and lives those standards in the competency of **leading by example**. The third part to the leading competency covers a wide range of attributes for the strategic leader. It is the foundation for a leader because it establishes the standards for all to follow. The two key components of leading by example are to display character by modeling the Army Values consistently through actions, attitudes, and communications and to seek and accept diverse ideas and points of view.

The character displayed by the strategic leader begins to set the climate for the organization. Leaders are always being watched and nothing that they do goes unnoticed. “Leaders set the tone and the pace for all the people working for them. Therefore, they need to be what they want to see.”⁸

A strategic leader needs to seek diversity to build his team. Diversity brings strengths and weaknesses from a variety of cultures. The strategic leader needs to capitalize on all of the strengths and minimize the impact of the weaknesses. One of the challenges of managing diversities for the leader is to create an atmosphere where diversities are recognized, encouraged and celebrated. If a leader were building a variety of diversity just to have diversity and trying to make everyone act, think and be the same, then he is missing the point of having diversity on his team. Diversity can make the team stronger, more successful and more adaptable. It is up to the leader to determine how he will use diversity on his team.⁹

Another component that goes together with leading by example, the ability to influence and leading others is **communicating**. Communicating also has two areas which we will consider. These components are listening actively and conveying thoughts and ideas to ensure shared understanding. Without this competency, the leader may set the example and form a great team, but he will not be able to convert the visions and intent into actions.

Communicating requires listening skills as well as speaking and writing. Listening to subordinates to get their interpretations and ideas and understanding situations from their viewpoints should be the goal of the leader. Many people on the team have great and new ideas that we can sometimes miss if we are not listening to

them. . The leader should stimulate, encourage, and find ways to facilitate the upward communication. These listening skills can also be applied to the many levels of influence outside of the organization.

A strategic leader must convey his thoughts and ideas to his team to ensure they understand his intent and vision, but also to build the team. “Sharing information with subordinates tends to diminish doubts and suspicions; it bolsters the security and feeling of confidence that are so necessary for effectiveness and morale.”¹⁰

Developing

The second competency for strategic leaders is developing. Leaders develop the team by creating the environment for the team to work, develop themselves to be prepared to lead the team and set a positive direction and example, and develop others to be productive members of the team.

The leader must create a positive environment for his team to operate. The climate for the team is set by the leader with a set of high standards and expectations. A positive environment establishes loyalty and cohesion in the team by fair treatment and giving each member a voice in the team. “Thus, at high levels, a principal leadership task is to create a climate that will encourage commitment to organizational objectives and provide opportunities for the maximum exercise of subordinates’ knowledge, experience, skill and initiative, within the framework of organizational requirements.”¹¹

The leader must also focus on self-development. He must ensure that he stays current and relevant on technical, cultural and political issues by continuing to learn in each of these areas. The leader must also learn from the team members’ feedback to

ensure that he has a clear picture of himself, his leader competencies and the mission. Being able to compile information is not enough; the leader must analyze and process the information that he receives into useful knowledge to make changes and improvement in himself, the team and the system. He will make the team better by improving himself.¹²

The last area of the developing competency is developing others. Just as the leader needs to ensure he stays current and relevant, he also must ensure other team members do the same. He is responsible for guiding, mentoring and encouraging the team members in their field as well as expanding their knowledge outside of their specific field. He must provide opportunities and resources to ensure that team members can improve themselves in the technical areas. The leader also has a responsibility to ensure that team members are provided the opportunity to grow in team building, communication and mission oriented areas. When the leader puts more effort into developing the team members, the team is higher qualified and more cohesive.¹³

Achieving

The third competency for leaders is achieving. Leaders achieve by producing results. The results are the products that the leader is responsible to complete. How well a leader achieves results is determined by the quality and quantity of supervising, managing, monitoring and controlling the work. This competency focuses less on the people and team and more on the tasks.

The leader must organize the teams and set priorities for each section and remove the obstacles and distractions from the team's path. The leader must not set the goals of the organization too high to be achieved. He must establish a fair and

equitable reward system and tie them to measures of performance. The team members will be motivated to achieve goals and exceed the measures of performance when the reward is clearly identified.¹⁴

The leader competencies provide the roles for the leader. Leading, developing and achieving are the competencies to look for in leaders to determine how each leader will fit in to a role on the team. These competencies also are important when faced with bringing on new team leaders. The foundation of the team is built by these competencies in the leaders of the team.

Leader Attributes

Leader attributes are character descriptions of the leader. Attributes are characteristics that make up an individual's internal core, outward appearance, and intellectual aspects. These attributes complement the leader competencies and determine how a leader behaves in situations. Attributes for leaders are character, presence and intellectual capacity.¹⁵

Character

Character is the internal factors of the leader that make up his core. The character displayed by the senior leader begins to set the climate for the organization. Leaders must set the standard and live by it. The Army Values provide the leader a starting place to discern right from wrong in any situation. These principles and qualities are essential for successful leaders. A leader with character will have empathy for his team members. He will be able to experience an event from another person's viewpoint. The leader will genuinely care for his team members and their well-being. He can identify with the feelings and emotions of those entrusted to his care. The

leader's character also allows him to share the spirit of the team. His character is the internal attribute that determines the motive of his leadership.¹⁶

Presence

Presence is how the leader is perceived by the team members. Their perception is based on the leader's outward appearance, demeanor, actions and words. Leaders are always being watched and nothing that they do goes unnoticed. The team watches for the way the leader projects his image of authority. The authoritative presence must be professional for the team to respect that authority. Physical appearance also plays a part in the team's perception. They are looking for physical health to ensure that the leader has the strength and endurance to lead them. In addition to physical health, they are looking for emotional fitness to ensure that the leader can cope with the stress in a positive manner. The confidence of the leader is vital to his presence. The team wants a leader who is confident of himself, his ability to lead the team and of the team's direction. They want to be assured that the leader can maintain his composure and be the calm through the storm. The leader must also be able to recover from setbacks without damaging the team or its mission. All of these factors play a role in the perception of the team and the development of the leader's presence.¹⁷

Intellectual Capacity

Intellectual capacity is the mental capabilities that shape the leaders' conceptualization and effectiveness. Leaders need mental agility to maintain flexibility, adapt ideas to produce the desired effects, evaluate second- and third-order effects, and apply multiple perspectives and approaches. Judgment ensures that leaders can accurately assess situations and reach the appropriate conclusions and decisions.

Innovative leaders have the tendency to present new ideas to creatively solve challenging circumstances. Leaders need to possess interpersonal tact that allows them to understand relationships, interact effectively, and know the impact of others' motives and character on their interactions. Having domain knowledge for leaders is vital because it keeps them relevant in the technical, tactical, joint and cultural environments. These attributes in the intellectual capacity keep the leaders engaged mentally and ahead of the game to better lead the team to mission accomplishment with minimal frustration from the team members.¹⁸

Servant Leaders

Servant leaders are utilizing different models of leadership. They oppose top-down, autocratic leadership and utilize the participatory management, the flat organizational style, democratic leadership which is better known as servant leadership.¹⁹ Servant leaders are identified by their willingness to make themselves available to serve, paying attention to needs, doing their best with what they have, doing every task with equal dedication, and their faithfulness to their teams. These qualities are easy to identify, but not as easy to find in today's leaders.

A servant leader is available to answer the call to serve whenever the call is made. Many leaders are only willing to serve when it is convenient for them or if it does not disrupt any plans that they may have had. But the servant leader is ready at all times and is not resentful or frustrated when he is called to serve. He must reprioritize his activities to answer the call to serve and relinquishes the control of his own schedule. The servant leader puts his team members' needs before his own needs.²⁰

Servant leaders are constantly looking for opportunities to serve and individuals to help. They notice someone in need and immediately begin to find a way to help him. They view it as an opportunity to grow in servanthood. Many of these opportunities are missed because some leaders choose to ignore those needs, lack the sensitivity to truly want to help or lack the spontaneity to respond to the needs. "They must be willing and able to think outside of their job description, to be willing to tackle the kinds of jobs that others are too proud or too frightened to take on."²¹

Doing the best with what they have is the philosophy of servant leaders. They do not make excuses or wait for additional resources. The perfect conditions will never exist. If leaders wait for perfect conditions, then they will not be providing the best leadership possible. Servant leaders believe that the talents that they possess are good enough to handle the situation. If they need additional resources or talents, then they will find them along the way. But lacking certain talents or resources never stops the servant leader from getting involved and making progress.²²

"The race to be a leader is crowded, but the field is wide open for those willing to be servants."²³ Servant leaders put their hearts into everything that they do. Each task is tackled with the same amount of dedication and effort. They do not worry about the size of the commitment. Their focus is on the fact that there is something that needs to be accomplished and that they are the ones that need to act on it. Servant leaders do not place themselves above others and only choose to help when the task is at their level. They are willing to serve at the lowest levels, doing the menial jobs, and helping those in need. Servant leaders' hearts can be seen by others in the acts they do that other leaders and people do not think of doing. They show that there is no task that is

beneath them and that they are there to do whatever needs to be done. Leaders can serve upward to those in positions of authority or downward to those in need. As long as they are serving others and willing to do anything needed, they are developing servants' hearts. Servant leaders are led by their hearts and follow them to meet the needs of their teams.²⁴

Faithfulness is another quality that defines servant leaders. Servant leaders are faithful to their teams by fulfilling their commitments, keeping promises, and finishing the tasks that they start. They have earned the reputation of being trustworthy and dependable by staying with a project until it is complete. They don't quit when things get difficult. Many people don't take their commitments seriously and are willing to break them without hesitation, remorse or regret. But servant leaders can be counted on. Servant leaders serve for their entire lifetimes. They may retire from the team and their careers, but they continue to serve someone or some organizations throughout their lifetimes. Servant leaders are faithful in all that they do. It is not a skill that they have learned and only apply in certain situations. It is a part of them.²⁵

Servant leaders maintain a low profile. Servant leaders are role models for humility. They do not promote themselves or the things that they do. They do not call attention to themselves. If they are recognized for their actions, they humbly accept it and don't allow the recognition to distract them from their duties and commitments. There are leaders that like to portray that they are servant leaders for the publicity and attention that it brings. They turn helping others into a performance. Servanthood can not coexist with self-promotion. Servant leaders are satisfied with working behind the scenes and not drawing attention to themselves. Some leaders start off as servant

leaders, but are eventually won over to the celebrity side. They become addicted to the attention and become blind from living in the spotlight. You won't find many of the servant leaders in the "Halls of Fame" or "Who's Who" publications because they know that notoriety is nothing compared to the significance of their contributions. Servant leaders are only interested in serving, not the fame that may go with it.

"Thousands of books have been written on leadership, but few on servanthood. Everyone wants to lead; no one wants to be a servant. We would rather be generals than privates."²⁶ The servant leaders have many qualities that distinguish themselves from other leaders. The servant leaders are the ones that will best serve the team, the mission and their senior leaders. Their willingness to serve, ability to recognize needs, knowledge that they can serve without all of the perfect resources, dedication, faithfulness and humility bring great attributes to the team. These attributes distinguish servant leaders from other leaders and allow the servant leader to be more effective and influential on the team.²⁷ "When put into practice, this radical concept of servant leadership has incredible power. Leaders who practice this paradigm transform their organizations and unleash power, trust and love that are almost unbelievable."²⁸

Toxic Leaders

Toxic Leaders are those leaders who destroy the value of the organization and the spirit of the team. Their leadership styles are harmful to the people. Toxic leaders are dangerous because they share some of the characteristics of great organizational leaders such as competent, politically astute, visionary, and charismatic.²⁹ Senior leaders must first know the characteristics of the toxic leaders, the impact of the toxic leader on the organization, , and then attempt to detoxify him. Toxic leaders have a

detrimental effect on the organization. “In the end, it is not one specific behavior that deems one toxic; it is the cumulative effect of demotivational behavior on unit morale and climate over time that tells the tale. Toxic leaders might be highly competent and effective in a short-sighted sense, but they contribute to an unhealthy command climate with ramifications extending far beyond their tenure.”³⁰

Characteristics

The characteristics of toxic leaders can include many different qualities. Some of the negative qualities of the toxic leaders to look out for in leaders are arrogance, self-centeredness, shifting blame, retribution, acting differently around superiors than around subordinates, and greed for power and recognition. This is not a complete list of all the characteristics, but the ones that are common in multiple sources that address the characteristics of toxic leaders.

The toxic leader is arrogant. He believes that he is always right and any opposing views are wrong. He surrounds himself with people who will do as they are told without questioning the authority figure. He keeps information to himself and only shares with a select few on his team. He believes that he is the only one that has new or good ideas.³¹

The toxic leader is self-centered and self-promoting. He is only concerned with himself and the success of his own ideas and his career. He will sacrifice the team and individual team members to get himself a step ahead. He will project his inner pain and conflict on other – believing that he is surrounded by the weak and incompetent, and that he alone can bring success to the organization.³²

When things do not go as the toxic leader has planned, then he will shift the blame to the team member nearest to the failure. He will sacrifice others' reputations and careers to cover up his own mistakes and incompetence. The toxic leader will take the credit for everything that goes right, but he is quick to place the responsibility of failure on one of his subordinate team members. He will delegate the responsibility for everything and the authority for nothing.

The toxic leader can not afford any negative publicity for his own mistakes because of his greed for power and recognition. He is just the opposite of the servant leader when it comes to recognition. The toxic leader is driven by being in the spotlight. He loves the power of his position and is quick to abuse the power entrusted to him.

These are a few of the characteristics to look for in leaders. When a leader shows a tendency to have one of them, it does not classify him as a toxic leader. The toxic leader will exhibit a combination of these characteristics and the team will quickly feel the effects of them.

Impact on the Organization

The toxic leader instills fear in the members of the organization. Everyone is afraid of the toxic leader because of his position in the organization. The toxic leader blames the team members that oppose his views and tries to ruin their reputations and careers. The team members begin avoiding the toxic leader and finding ways to work around him in hopes that he redirects his negative attention to someone or something else. This avoidance behavior gives the toxic leader momentum because no one wants to get involved due to the potential of professional damage.³³

The fear of the toxic leader can push team members to unethical behavior and corruption because the team members are afraid to fail or not do exactly as the toxic leader has dictated. The pressure felt by the team members to please the toxic leader to keep him from ruining their reputations and careers will drive them to do things that they normally would not do. This pressure also leads the organization to have interdepartmental conflict. Each section of the team attempts to keep the toxic leader from targeting their section. So each section is focused on itself, not on the overall mission and coordination of the entire team.

The toxic leader stops creative thinking in the organization. He demands that everything is completed by his methods to produce the results that he wants. The toxic leader decreases innovation by the team members because he is threatened by the success of others. He feels that he must control everything and everyone, so he does not allow any new ideas except his own.

The toxic leaders also makes productivity decline because of the control that he has on the process. The team members do not have the authority to make any decisions, so progress stops while the seek guidance from the toxic leader. The toxic leader paralyzes the organization as the team members wait for the toxic leader to give guidance and approve actions. Productivity is also diminished by the morale of the team members. The toxic leader demoralizes the team by his leadership. The team members are more likely to move on to another position to be able to work in a better environment. So the toxic leader increases the turnover rate of the team members. The toxic leader drains the strength of the team by all of the negative effects of his leadership style.

Detoxifying

Toxic leaders have no place in the organization. Most are not toxic leaders from the beginning of their careers as leaders, but they are influenced by their experiences. Setting clear expectations for behavior in the organization is the first step to redirecting their behavior and stopping the toxicity. These leaders will know and understand the expectations from the senior leader. Then the senior leader needs to recognize the teams with low morale and investigate the cause. When the cause is a toxic leader, the senior leader must document the behavior of that toxic leader and inform him of the impact of continuing this toxic behavior on his evaluation, position in the organization and his career. The senior leader has an obligation to ensure that the toxic leader has a realistic picture of himself and leadership style by providing superior, peer and subordinate critiques. The toxic leader must make continuous improvement or be removed from the position.³⁴

The toxic leader needs to recognize the need for change and realize that the change is not going to be easy. It generally requires a crisis to generate this realization for the toxic leader. Pressure from the senior leader by means of an ultimatum is the most effective motivation for him. The toxic leader must be serious and dedicated to making the change. The process is not easy and requires a great commitment from him to change his habits and leadership characteristics and style. Changing the toxic leader also requires a commitment from the senior leader to coach and mentor him through the process. The senior leader needs to have frequent meetings with him to analyze his needs and develop a specific plan customized for the toxic leader's situation. With a desire to change and a boss to create an environment that allows that change and

dedication to see him through the process, the toxic leader can recover and be a productive leader in the organization.³⁵

Conclusion and Recommendation

Leaders should identify the individual qualities for subordinate leaders of the team and know why it is important to have the right people on the team prior to arriving to lead a new team. They need to learn the organization and mission as quickly as possible upon arrival. Then leaders can identify the needs of the organization, set goals for the team and define the qualities, direction and mission of the team. They can assess each team member and assign the position that best fits each individual. Leaders will observe the team to ensure the members are thriving in each position and identify any members that may need additional training, an alternate position or removal from the team. After the team is established and functioning efficiently, leaders can focus on the mission and spend less time focusing on the team.

Leaders are responsible for many things. If they invest the time in building the leaders of the team first, then they will have time to focus and guide the mission and will avoid dedicating substantial time to resolving personnel issues. The team will function properly and will accomplish the assigned missions effectively and efficiently.

Endnotes

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