



Secretary Mattis' Leadership Principles

On Leadership

Leadership = Competence + Authentic Character

Attitudes are caught, not taught.

Organizations and institutions get the behavior they reward.

If you mix good people with bad processes, the processes will win nine times out of ten.

Command and feedback beats command and control.

Know what you stand for and what you will not tolerate.

Protect your mavericks.

Reconcile natural polarities.

Don't resent the problems that come to you. Each one is a normal part of your job.

Decentralize decision-making to the lowest capable level.

Define the problem.

Reward initiative and aggressiveness.

Know when to apply non-quantitative analysis. Too early, you're lazy. Too late, you're mechanistic.

Do not permit your passion for excellence to destroy your compassion for subordinates.

As a second lieutenant, I realized my guys weren't lying awake at night wondering, 'How can I screw up Lieutenant Mattis' day?'

We are masters of our character. We choose what we will stand for in this life.

On Communication

Clearly convey your intent to unleash subordinates' initiative and aggressiveness.

Data not displayed is data not acted on.

If you do not promote your values, someone else will promote theirs'.

When leading large organizations, use touchstones. Put a human face on the mission, convey your intent, and reach your subordinates' hearts and minds.

Share your courage.

There are three types of information: housekeeping, decision-making, alarms. Of each, ask: what do I know?

Who needs to know? Have I told them?

On Fighting

Be ethically ferocious.

Be eager to close with and fight the enemy.

We have no God-given right to victory on the battlefield.

Combat can lead to post-traumatic growth.

Learn to fight without a C2 system.

Fight in accord with our values and you will win trust. Every child in every village you enter should be able to look at you like a parent.

Every battlefield is also a humanitarian field.

In the U.S. military, we look forward to closing with the enemy.

Combat rubs off the thin veneer of civilization. Do not fall into the temptation to only work with those who think, speak, and look like you.

When we commit our forces to action, it will be the enemy's longest and worst day.

In my own command group, 17 of my 29 Sailors and Marines were killed or wounded in five months, yet they never hesitated to move against the enemy.

On Ethics

Run the ethical midfield.

Know the difference between a mistake and a lack of discipline.

Keep a firing squad.

The unit with poor firing discipline in the field is the same with high rates of DUI's and sexual assault in the barracks.

The ultimate test of conscience is willingness to sacrifice for future generations whose thanks you will never hear.

As long as we recruit from an America that objectifies women, this will also occur in the military. Work hard to weed these people out. Recognize you cannot do this fast enough.

On Teamwork

Our competitive advantage is our jointness – our ability to integrate across the services and coalitions.

Forge vicious harmony across your team.

If you cannot build trust, your leadership is obsolete, and you need to have the courage to go home.

The services should be integrated, not identical.

What counts most in war is what's difficult to count.

I had the privilege to fight many times for America. I never fought in a solely American formation.

Even Jesus of Nazareth had one out of twelve go to crap on him.

Ride for the brand.

Loyalty only counts when there are a hundred reasons not to be.

On Military Service

The members of our military look past today's hot political rhetoric and write a blank check to the American people, payable with their lives.

Be sentinels for this nation.

We're the good guys. We're not the perfect guys, but we are the good guys.

We represent America's awesome determination to protect herself.

Steady as she goes.

We represent the fundamental unity of our people.

I wasn't in the Marine Corps for 40 years, I was in the U.S. Marine Corps.

We ensure the President and our diplomats always negotiate from positions of strength.

Our military is a national treasure built on the blood, sweat, and tears of patriots.

Tell our adversaries: better talk to the Department of State. You don't want to fight the Department of Defense.

Our job is to keep the peace – one more year, one more month, one more day, one more hour.

Our military is unapologetic and apolitical.

Military service is a touchstone for American patriots of all races, genders, and creeds. It is not a life insurance policy.

America is like a bank: if you want to take something out, then you must put something in. The members of our military have, without doubt, put something into the nation's moral bank.

We will face nothing worse than Valley Forge, Shiloh, Belleau Wood, Ploesti, Midway, the Bulge, Iwo Jima, Pork Chop Hill, Khe Sanh, or Falluja.

Hold the line.

On Strategy

Problem statement: how do we maintain a safe and effective nuclear deterrent, while at the same time fielding a decisive conventional force and maintain irregular warfare as a core capability?

The paradox of war is the enemy will always move against perceived weakness.

There is nothing new under the sun.

We must not be dominant and at the same time irrelevant.

War is an open system. There is no 'x + y = z.'

The surest way to prevent war is to be prepared to win it.

Define the problem to a Jesuit's level of satisfaction.

Look to the future, knowing you won't get it 100 percent right, but you must not get it 100 percent wrong. Doctrine is the last refuge of the unimaginative.

An undefeated army can lose a war.

Culture trumps doctrine and tactics.

Operations occur at the speed of trust. HANDCON trumps OPCON.

Surprise will be your constant companion.

Never tell the enemy what we will not do.

We may want a war to be over. We may even declare it over. But the enemy gets a vote.

Be brilliant in the basics. Because from the Bataan Peninsula to Kasserine Pass to Task Force Smith, we know too well the cost of not being ready.

On Alliances and Partnerships

History is clear: nations with strong allies thrive; those without wither.

Fight by, with, and through our allies and partners.

Be willing not just to listen, but to be persuaded.

Not all good ideas come from the country with the most aircraft carriers.

I never operated in an all-American formation.

Accept caveats. Do not impose them. We sometimes expect perfection from other countries that we don't expect of our own.

Friends need tending, and we need friends.

On Humility

You can't drink your own whiskey.

When I became a Marine, my aims were modest. I thought 'Maybe I'll make captain.' It freed me up to not worry about my next command and focus instead on doing the best job I could in the one I had.

Modesty: believe so completely in subordinates they have no choice but to believe in themselves; act from integrity and authenticity, let your very goodness put ambition out of context. Be brave, honest, humble – be a homerun of a human being.

On Affordability

Gain full value from every taxpayer dollar spent on defense. Earn the trust of Congress and the American people.

From Others

If left unsung, the noblest deeds will die.

— *Pindar*

A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects.

— *Robert A. Heinlein*

We must uphold principles that have benefitted all of us, like respect for the rule of law, individual rights, and freedom of navigation and overflight, including open shipping lanes. These principles create stability and build trust, security, and prosperity among like-minded nations.

— *President Trump*

(delivered 11/10/17 in speech to
Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Danang)

If you have 60 minutes to save the world, spend fifty-five minutes defining the problem and five minutes determining the solution.

— *Albert Einstein*

You may fly over a nation forever, you may bomb it, atomize it, pulverize it and wipe it clean of life. But if you desire to defend it, if you desire to protect it, if you desire to keep it for civilization, you must do this on the ground the way the Roman legions did: by putting your young men in the mud.

– *T.R. Fehrenbach*

There is a unique dignity to those who serve in our Armed Forces.

– *Senator John McCain*

To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.

General George Washington

In CENTCOM we don't blindly follow service doctrine.

– *General John Abizaid*

Only thing tougher than fighting with allies is fighting without them.

– *Winston Churchill*

America is great because America is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

– *Alexis de Tocqueville*

The incommunicable experience of war.

– *Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*

Those who serve have hearts touched with fire. Having known great things... [they are] content with silence.

– *Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*

As life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time, at peril of being judged not to have lived.

– *Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*

Combat is a test of character; it makes bad men worse and good men better.

– *General Joshua Chamberlain*

Need officers with a keen sensitivity to human nature.

– *General Creighton Abrams*

We cannot adopt a singular, preclusive approach to war, because the enemy will generally gravitate to our perceived weakness.

– *Colin Gray*

A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.

– *Jackie Robinson's Epitaph*

I believe in the human race. I believe in the warm heart. I believe in man's integrity. I believe in the goodness of a free society, and I believe that the society can remain good only as long as we are willing to fight for it.

– *Jackie Robinson*

Sometimes a man of war is the best ambassador.

– *Oliver Cromwell*

The better angels of our nature.

– *Abraham Lincoln*

Service meant that when your country called, you answered the call. It would never have occurred to anyone to question it. If the president said he needed you, that was enough.

– *Chuck Hagel*

In leading soldiers you will have riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human Heart.

– *F. Scott Fitzgerald*

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old / Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn / At the going down of the sun and in the morning / We will remember them

– *Laurence Binyon*

It is not the places that grace men, but men the places.

– *Plutarch*

Sleep soldiers, still in honored rest / Your truth and valor wearing
/ The bravest are the tenderest; / The loving are the daring

– Bayard Taylor, *The Song of the Camp*, 1856

Faced with two problems: first, how to reduce regional chaos; second, how to create a coherent world order based on agreed-upon principles that are necessary for the operation of the entire system.

– Henry Kissinger

You, when you're on the road, must have a code that you can live by... All on a road, all need a code.

– Crosby, Stills, and Nash

In great deeds, something abides.

– Colonel Joshua Chamberlain (*Little Round Top, Battle of Gettysburg*)

We Americans have many grave problems to solve... many evils to fight... and many deeds to do if – as we hope and believe – we have the wisdom... the strength... the courage... and the virtue to do them. But we must face facts as they are. Our nation is that one among all nations of the earth which holds in its hands the fate of coming years.

– Teddy Roosevelt

What enables the wise sovereign and the good general to strike and conquer is foreknowledge.

– Sun Tzu

Ideals have the power to inspire... Discouraged people are in sore need of the inspiration of great principles.

– George Marshall

Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water, and yet drink death like wine.

– G.K. Chesterton

That we totally defeated our enemies and then brought them back to the community of nations. I would like to think that only America would have done this.

– Harry Truman (*on the part of his presidency that made him proudest*)

If you can't ride two horses at once, get out of the circus.

– Tony Blair

You should be satisfied with the way you have conducted yourself, with no remorse for the past, confident regarding the present and full of hope for the future. When you retire to bed you should sleep the sleep of the brave.

– Alexander Dumas

As in war you have been good soldiers, so in peace you will make good citizens.

– General William Sherman (1865)

There was no one better to have beside you when the chips were down than a U.S. Marine.

– Ernest Hemingway

Dear Lord/ Lest I continue/ My complacent way/ Help me to remember/ Somewhere out there/ A man died for me today./ As long as there must be war/ I then must/ Ask and answer/ Am I worth dying for?

– Prayer that Eleanor Roosevelt carried in her wallet