

From the Commander • Leadership

Leadership Character

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“Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without the strategy.” — Gen. (ret.) H. Norman Schwarzkopf (22 August 1934 – 27 December 2012).

Surely some of us have read Aristotle’s Nicomachean and Eudemian Ethical treatises on views of virtuous well-lived lives, or that of Plato’s Republic Eudaemonistic virtue-based well-being concept that he considered the highest good (or aim) of one’s life. Perhaps (as it does with me) Immanuel Kant’s Metaphysics of Morals – with its practical boiled down empirically Black and White views – agrees with your own internal compass. Whether it be David Hume’s Treatise of Human Nature, John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism, or even Hugo Grotius – who simply argued that we maintain morals not for ourselves, but instead because unjust actions violate the rights of others – there is no limit to the argument that ethics are at

the center of what drives our lives. In each decision, in all action, does the source of our justification cross paths with our personal ethical standards. Even in the Army does the publication covering leadership speak of character marked by integrity through “...doing what is right, legally and morally.” (Army, Department of, 6-22, 2012, p. 6).



As leaders, we are called to action, to

always do “what is right”, both legally and morally. And since what we each determine to be moral is conceived through our individual ethical standards, this is the foundation, the start of all our reasoning.

Do we make excuses by attempting to “justify” the ends with the means? Or, do we accept responsibility for our actions, place others before ourselves, and take the hard right over the easy wrong? Every single course of action we take must at some level consider our ethics. It is not in attempted justification that we find the reasons for our actions, but rather the source of what initiated motivation that we find what drives us. Thus, our actions based upon that source become our Character.

Now one could argue that we see the benefit of path “A” over path “B”, and that this benefit would become our stimulant; yet even within this reasoning do we find the embedded question of “Why?” This “Why?” is our “Standard” because it outlines the conceptualization of cognitive beliefs, and the start of our ethical standards intersection with action. “Why” is the point at which we draw a line between what we are willing to accept, and what we might not. Whether or not we violate our own beliefs is not a question over the ethics themselves, but rather one covering what we are willing to accept. Truthfully, the standard of ethical behavior has never changed – standing steadfast since the dawn of human existence. The only thing that has changed is the next evil that each generation of a society determines it is willing to accept.



Leaders must at all times stand elitists above the masses detrimental determinations, if for no other reason than to do what is right. We are shepherds to the flock, guides that show the way, mentors that hint toward knowledge, masters which craft. At all times are we to set the example. No matter the situation, no matter what the world sends your way, your actions determine your character, and in the face of adversity, tell the world who you truly are and what you actually stand for. Entire nations have both been born and fallen as a direct result of the character of men. Wars were both won and lost at the

actions of those who chose the hard right or the easy wrong. Do you compromise your ethical standards to make a choice? Or do you stand your ground, stand by your beliefs, and maintain an honorable character? This 4th of July, let us remember what character means to us, to those who follow us, and to the lives of



those who have gone before us.



To continue in the words of General Schwarzkopf:

“The truth of the matter is that you always know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it.” – Gen. (ret.) H. Norman Schwarzkopf (22 August 1934 – 27 December 2012).

References:

Army, Department of (2012). Army Directorate of Publications 6-22 – Army Leadership. Headquarters (formerly Field Manual 6-22), Department of the Army.

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About the author



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AJ is a retired U.S. Army NCO who served in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army. He is a combat veteran, and has participated in contingency operations around the world. AJ is the Owner of Veteran Leadership Solutions, the Founder and Editor in Chief of The Warfighter Journal, and is a published Sociological Analyst, Researcher, Guest Lecturer, and Public Speaker. He is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University with a focus on Sociology and a science degree in Organizational Leadership, and is published in the field of sociology. AJ is an inductive analyst; public figure; researcher/writer; aviator; a certified advanced operational diver; professional instructor, trainer, mentor, and adviser; snowboarder; motorcycle rider; world traveler; he enjoys long distance endurance events, and much more.