

Leaders Must CARE

By Col (Ret) Chris Richie

I recently started my first (and hopefully last) post-military retirement job. After a month in my new profession, I feel so much more comfortable in my role as leader in a small, yet extremely impactful and highly functional team. Starting a brand-new profession after serving as a Marine for three decades was daunting. Several questions permeated my thoughts such as, "How can I do well in a job for which I have little experience?" Of course, military service prepares us to be good leaders; however, military leadership and civilian leadership might not be viewed as similar. Rather than focusing my thoughts on self-doubt, I reminded myself of the fundamental aspects of leadership in any field. In short, being a person of character who focuses on people and relationships.

I was also reminded of John Maxwell's writings about the five levels of leadership and the sad fact that 80% of today's supervisors are stuck at level 1, characterized by a person who will use their position to coerce and punish others through fear. Simply put, a level 1 leader does not lead, they boss because they are self-focused. I think those who remain in this level never move beyond self-doubt, lack confidence in themselves, and simply don't trust or care for others. We have all likely experienced a boss who acts in this manner. Any new boss automatically starts at level 1 until their actions start to speak volumes on how they view themselves and others.

A person of character will not remain in level 1 very long. People of character will take seriously the words of Winston Churchill who stated, "***You make a living off of what you get, but you make a lifetime from what you give.***" In summary, a leader's role exists to serve the needs of others. In time, people of character will learn the skills required of their job and, along-the-way, will have built strong relationships with their team. Peter Schutz, former CEO of Porsche, understood this when he encouraged organizations to "**Hire character, train skill.**"

On my first day in my new profession, I endeavored to live by one of my favorite statements by the former President Teddy Roosevelt; "***People will not care how much you know, until they know how much you care.***" This quote has always inspired me to focus on people as I try to be the best leader in whatever role I found myself. In terms of application; however, there is no roadmap to articulate precisely how to show your team that you genuinely care. After thirty days on the job, I have found that a sincere effort to **Communicate**, be **Available**, be **Respectful**, and **Encourage** others (C-A-R-E) is a good path to follow. In short, new leaders who wish to connect with their team and build relationships must **C-A-R-E**.

Communicate

The world-famous military strategists and leader Napoleon Bonaparte articulated that the fundamental role of a true leader is "***To define reality and inspire hope.***" I am an optimist by nature and always view the glass as half-full; however, this can sometimes be off-putting to a team who understands the reality of bad situations because they have been there before. Let's face it, sometimes the reality of a bad situation is just that, Bad! This is where a good leader steps in and communicates one of the most powerful words in human lexicon, **Hope**. To be honest, my first month came with a couple challenges and some of our realities had multiple barriers. Slowly, our team began to overcome the barriers until a path became clear. We arrived at that path because we collectively saw a better future and built bridges instead of roadblocks. Hope motivated us to move forward together.

Be Available

The author and priest, Henri Nouwen was moved by a fellow priest who admitted that in his younger years he would despise the interruptions by his team as he tried to work; "***I have always been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted; then I realized that the interruptions were my work.***" Learning a new job is time consuming and requires countless hours of reading policy, turnover binders, e-mails, etc. All of this requires time alone to process, take notes, and prepare. During this period, your team desperately wants and needs to get to

know you. Expectations must be articulated, and relationships must be built. As much as I want to learn everything about my new job, my focus has been on the people who will be the ones to help me thrive (or fail) in my new role. Just as Henri Nouwen observed, our first and foremost job should be people and relationships. For the majority of my first month, this has been time well spent.

Be Respectful

Every human being is unique. We all come from varied diverse backgrounds to include differences in our political viewpoints and religious beliefs. Far too many people are quick to argue their personal viewpoint and look down upon those who don't think the same way. I prefer to look upon my teammates through the lens that Martin Luther King Jr. taught us by judging others solely by the **content of their character**. For some, this will be difficult until they understand their own bias and reflect upon why they think the way they do. As much as we believe certain things; others feel just as strongly in their beliefs. Rather than attempting to push our own beliefs on others, perhaps we should be respectful of diverse viewpoints, and enjoy personal growth in the process.

Encourage others

In his book, Becoming a Person of Influence, John Maxwell tells us that to become a person of influence, “...***you have to come alongside them and really get involved in their lives.***” The Marine Corps states it more succinctly, “***Know your Marines.***” This goes far beyond simple job performance and means a leader must understand the goals and passions of others in both their personal and professional lives. Only then can a leader encourage someone to achieve their full potential. Encouraging others can be so refreshing, especially when we see that smile on their face and spark in their eye. When this happens, you know they are inspired to put their best foot forward. One of my favorite verses is Proverbs 11:25, “***He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.***” I have found this to be so true the times I have positively encouraged other people. Once you see them take that confident leap forward, you feel as though you are leaping with them; what a great feeling!

No one person owns the undisputed best definition of leadership. And rightly so, since leadership is more a journey, and less a place. Everyone has a separate and unique life's journey. During my 52-year life and leadership journey, I have grown, reflected, matured, and sometimes faltered as a leader. My current season in life has taught me that **leadership is simply a relationship built on trust**. A leader's trust can be earned in several ways; I try to follow the path of **Communicating**, being **Available**, being **Respectful**, and **Encouraging** others. Showing my new team that I genuinely **C-A-R-E** will take time and consistency. It is a long path that I look forward to traveling.

Semper Fidelis!