

Excerpts from *Executive Leadership: A Warfighter's Perspective*

The single most important leadership lesson I have learned, by way of ALFIE KOHN and others, is that staff need to be given the grace to determine their own standards of excellence. If the executive sets a tone of excellence and allows his or her subordinates to pursue work based on their own intrinsic standards, then not only excellence but perceived competence ensue. This is fundamental to morale. Said another way, it is fundamental to healthy organizational functioning. People need to be given the trust to define their own standards.

Oftentimes, when receiving a product of staff work, the only question I ask is the following: *Does this product meet your own standard of excellence?* If yes, I will generally accept it without revision or make minor edits myself, always taking care to provide constructive feedback to the originator. If you find that your staff's self-proclaimed products of excellence routinely fall short of your organization's standards, I submit to you that the work is probably yours to do in the first place. The mere act of delegating does not imply that the delegation is appropriate. Consider the possibility that your delegations are miscategorized—you expect a polished final product when, by qualification, experience, and responsibility, you should expect staff input to *your* final product. The completed staff work, in that case, rests on your shoulders and yours alone.

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For those interested in accelerated learning, mistakes prove cheapest second-hand. If you can learn from the mistakes of others, then you can leapfrog theirs and confront the next ones. One way I go about that is by reading. I read lots of material, to include fiction, nonfiction, and the news. But I concentrate my efforts on leadership books and biographies. Without question, a direct consequence of this has been my accelerated development.

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Adulthood, by the way, needs to be taught. More so modeled. Exemplified. It takes care and effort to develop our boys into men, our girls into women, our gender-ambiguous and gender-fluid children into adults. They, too, sing AMERICA.

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I once heard someone describe THE FALL OF MAN as an allegory depicting humankind's choice of knowledge over happiness. From time to time I catch wisps of this allegorical candle. Its fragrance so false yet no less real and tall. A fragrance like the middle passage, meant, nay, demanded to bear remembrance. Like HILL'S *vulnerable soul deserving to be woken gently*. Somehow still forgotten. THE FALL OF MAN is chestnut only in its modern manner of telling, only in its mistranslation upon insisted. Where hides that in our national discourse? And why? Could someone please teach my children the great and conflicted nature of KING DAVID, and what was the source of SOLOMON'S wisdom? What of JOB? RUTH? These lessons passed through time shall not pass with us. Au contraire, through us they shall pass. And yet still I struggle to convey these past lessons within the confines of my household.

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For any prospective authors out there, a typical book comprises on the order of one hundred thousand words. Five hundred words per day times two hundred days makes a full manuscript. You eat an elephant one bite at a time.

For any philosophers, humankind has ushered in three philosophical revolutions: ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, and LINGUISTIC. I conjecture we are on the cusp of a fourth: CREATIVE. Technological advancements are rapidly expanding the limits of artistic and philosophical cognition. What can be created might very well precede the question of language.