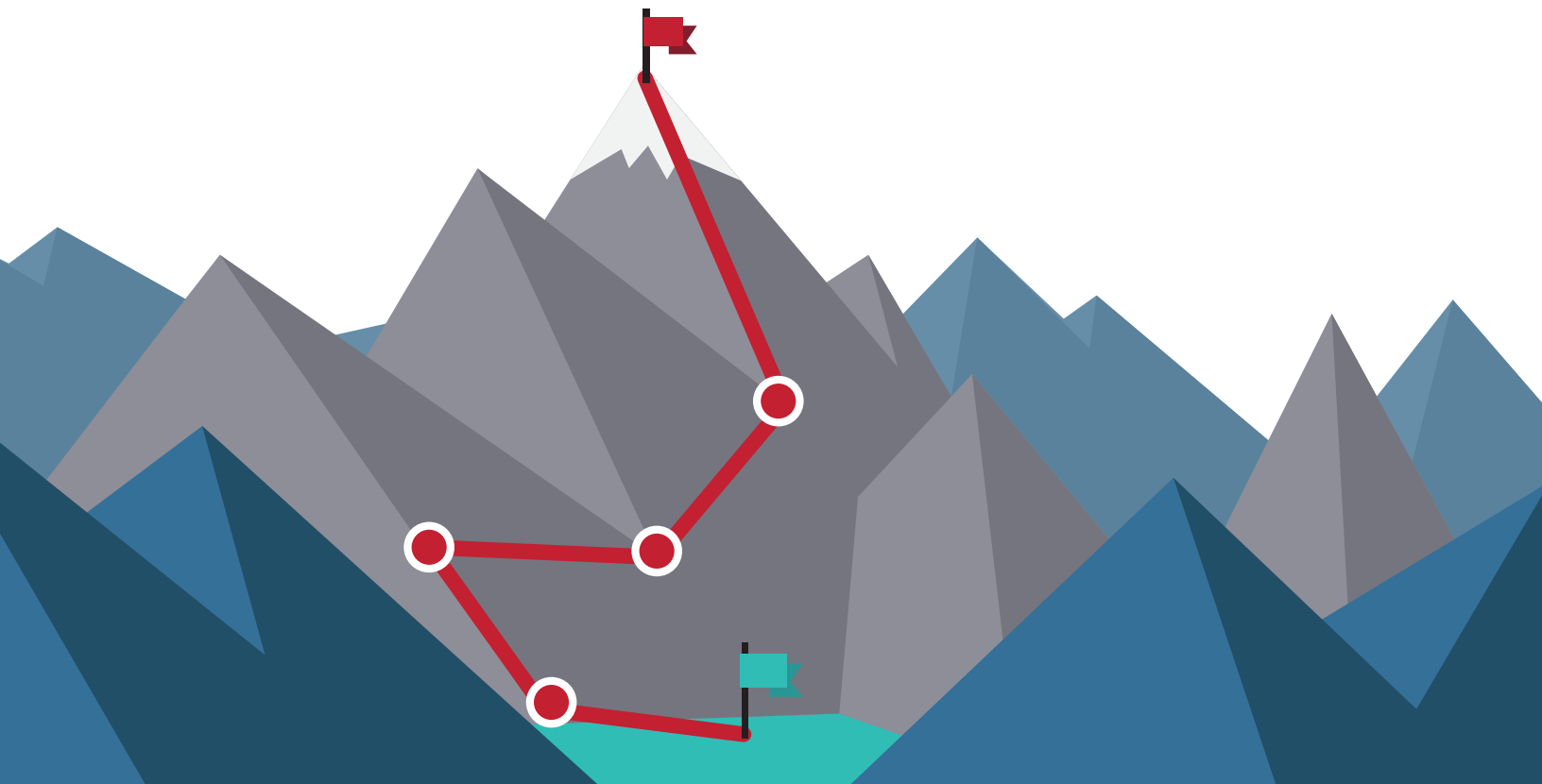


LEADERSHIP LESSONS

FROM A THREE-STAR GENERAL



AN EXPERT INTERVIEW WITH LT. GENERAL KOWALSKI

WELCOA★
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Leadership Lessons from a Three-Star General

with

LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES M. KOWALSKI



(U.S. Strategic Command photo by U.S. Navy Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Byron C. Linder/Released)

ABOUT **LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES M. KOWALSKI**

Lieutenant General James M. Kowalski assumed duties as deputy commander of United States Strategic Command in October 2013. General Kowalski entered active duty in 1980 through the ROTC program at the University of Cincinnati. He has held a variety of operational commands, including a bomb squadron, an operations group, a bomb wing, an air control wing, and an Air Force Major Command.

His contingency and wartime experience include command of the 2nd Operations Group when they deployed B-52s for combat during operations Noble Anvil and Allied Force, and command of the 28th Bomb Wing when they deployed B-1Bs for Operation Iraqi Freedom. From January 2003 to May 2003, General Kowalski commanded the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing in Southwest Asia where he led a combined wing of B-1Bs, E-3s and KC-135s to provide strike, battle management, and air refueling for operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and Southern Watch. His previous staff assignments include Headquarters Air Combat Command, Headquarters U.S. Air Force and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Prior to his current assignment, he served as Commander, Air Force Global Strike Command.

ABOUT **RYAN PICARELLA, MS, SPHR**

As President of WELCOA, Ryan works with communities and organizations around the country to ignite social movements that will improve the lives of all working people in America and around the world. With a deep interest in culture and sociology, Ryan approaches initiatives from a holistic perspective that recognizes the many paths to well-being that must be in alignment for long-term healthy lifestyle behavior change. Ryan brings immense knowledge and insight to WELCOA from his background in psychology and a career that spans human resources, organizational development and wellness program and product design. Prior to joining WELCOA, Ryan managed the award winning BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee (BCBST) Well@Work employee wellness program, a 2012 C. Everett Koop honorable mention awardee. Since relocating to Nebraska, Ryan has enjoyed an active role in the community, currently serving on the Board for the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition in Omaha. Ryan has a Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Northern Arizona University.

WELCOA CEO Ryan Picarella had the honor of visiting with Lieutenant General James Kowalski to have a conversation about leadership. What the Lt. General had to say about leading with integrity, through change and with a smile is an inspirational take on how leaders at all levels can earn the trust of those they serve. Learn about increasing employee performance, expanding your influence as a professional, and what makes a leader great.

★ General Kowalski, I'd love to get your thoughts on the type of leader that you strive to be. How do you define leadership and what makes a good leader?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: I think there are a couple of different ways to look at that. One is who has had influence on your life, because the values you develop are central to your leadership. Who did you look up to in terms of your value system and the things you believe? That in itself is a question that sometimes startles people and forces them to think about what they believe and the values they really have. Cultures are how people behave in an organization over time, and character, frankly, is how *you* behave over time. So when I think about leaders whom I look up to, I go back to my grandmother. She came over from Poland when she was 14 years old and did not speak English. She spoke Polish, Russian and German because the part of Poland she was from switched hands a few times and that area had mixed culture and mixed languages.

She came to the US, was married young and had seven children. When her first husband died, she took in people, set up a boarding house, put a garden in the backyard and managed to keep that family together. I never heard her yell; she was always smiling, always positive. I look back at her—and to some extent I may have mythologized it a little bit—but you think about how hard it would have been for her and what she went through, what she went through in the depression, what she went through in World War II when three of her sons went off to war. This is an example of a person who dealt with a lot of adversity but still stayed focused on goals and objectives and cared about other people and built a family out of that.

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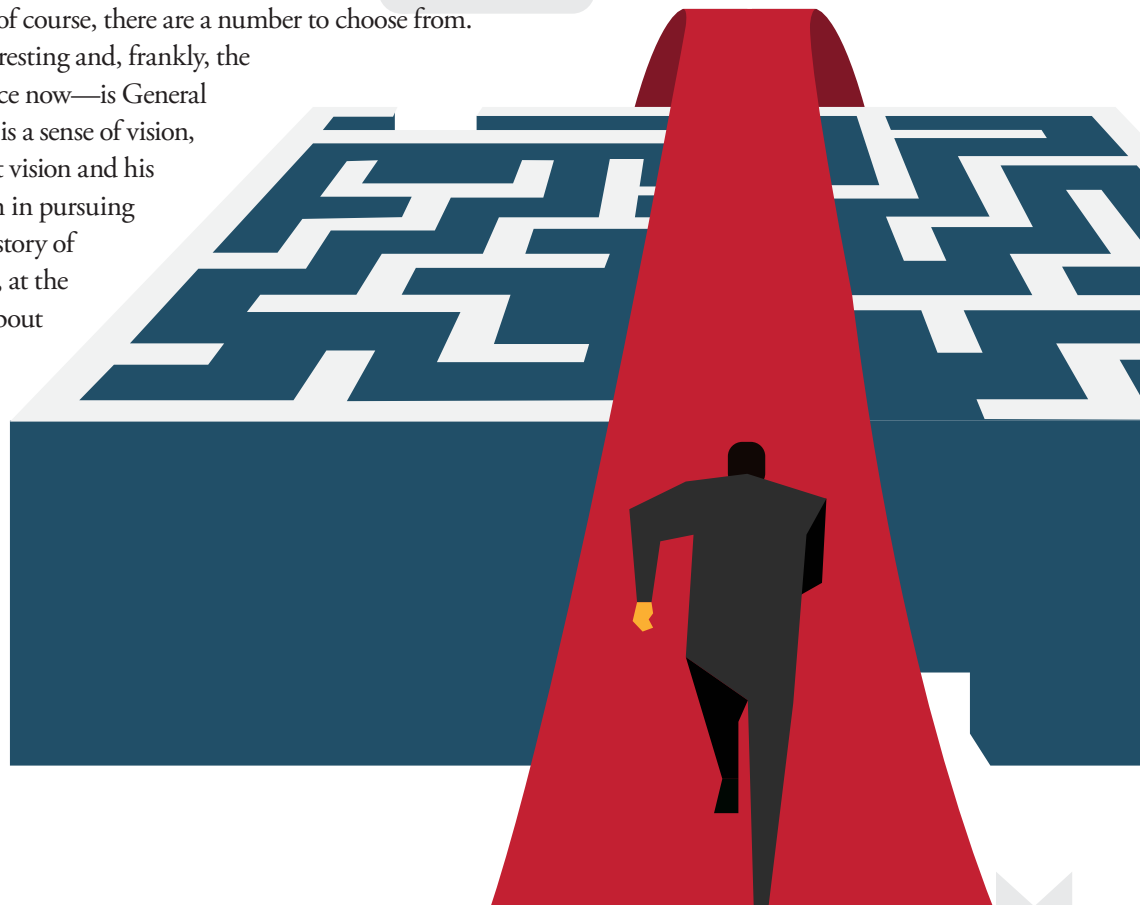


Next would be my dad who was in the Marine Corps. He served during Korea then went to work as a special agent for the Treasury Department. He has changed jobs a number of times, owned his own businesses, and spent almost a decade as an administrative pastor of an inner-city church with an attached school. I watched him deal with adversity and challenges, and his attitude was always like that verse out of the Bible, *if God takes care of the smallest sparrow, what makes you think he is not going to take care of you?* That kind of attitude keeps you from taking counsel of your fears and allows you to see what your opportunities are and, I think, encourages you to take care of things yourself.

So those are the two examples of leadership I would share but what most people are looking for when they ask this question is *who was the military person who affected me in my career*, and there are many. I've been able to take something away from virtually every leader I've come across whether it was positive or negative. But the first time I thought of myself more as an officer and leader, and I saw my own potential, was when I worked for a squadron commander who was basically John Wayne. He was everything that you imagine the mythical John Wayne to be. He was Texan, he was tall, he had the drawl; he was blunt but he was calm. You knew what his expectations were, you were rewarded when you met those expectations, and you were rewarded when you exceeded those expectations. You also saw that people who failed the organization were taken care of. They were disciplined. They did not retain good jobs. There was never any sense of favoritism; it was a microcosm of what I think the military is—a meritocracy where you're rewarded for things that you do and how well you perform.

Watching him lead I thought, *You know? I enjoy flying airplanes but I really want to lead the people who fly airplanes.* This put me on the path I am now. I also think it's useful to look at historical leaders, and, of course, there are a number to choose from. The one I've always found the most interesting and, frankly, the most useful—I've read his memoirs twice now—is General Grant. What I've taken away from him is a sense of vision, a focus on objectives that get you to that vision and his relentlessness and discipline of execution in pursuing those objectives. If you read the early history of General McClellan and his failures and, at the same time, Grant's successes and read about the logic that President Lincoln used to choose Grant, it's a pretty powerful reflection on Grant and also on Lincoln and how they related together.

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★ In thinking about those leaders you just described, your grandmother, your father, “John Wayne” and Grant, what are some common characteristics or attributes that you think that they all had in common with each other?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: I think all of them were true to themselves. What I never saw was a facade that they would put on for others. What you got from all of them was a sense of internal integrity and an understanding that they knew who they were, and they knew what their expectations were of themselves. That was really the standard they held themselves up to—not to the expectations of other people.

★ Can leadership be trained? Do you think that there are some abilities or personality characteristics that we’re born with, or can great leaders develop to be such over time?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: I think that if there is a person who has a desire to lead, then I think you can develop leadership skills. I don’t think you can really train *leadership*, but there is a training element to any leadership development program. One of the things I believe is a leader has to have some credibility with the group of people they’re leading. So if you’re going to lead an organization that makes widgets, you ought to have some knowledge of production and factories and widget-making, but if you’re coming in from being a reporter on the local news to lead the widget factory, you’re probably not going to do very well at first because people will lack confidence in you; you just don’t have a lot of credibility.

So credibility is important and you can develop credibility. Credibility is important internally too, so you have confidence in yourself and you understand what your organization does and whether or not they’re doing it well and then how to improve the organization. There is also a management training element to leadership. Management in my mind overlaps with leadership. I don’t think those are two very separate things. There are characteristics of each that can be different, but, at the end of the day, if you don’t understand management, I don’t think you’re going to be a very good or effective leader. There has to be an appreciation for that hard work of making an organization run, and a lot of those management skills are things you can train people in, but, in my mind, if you’re going to have someone who is going to be a good leader for you, first and foremost they have

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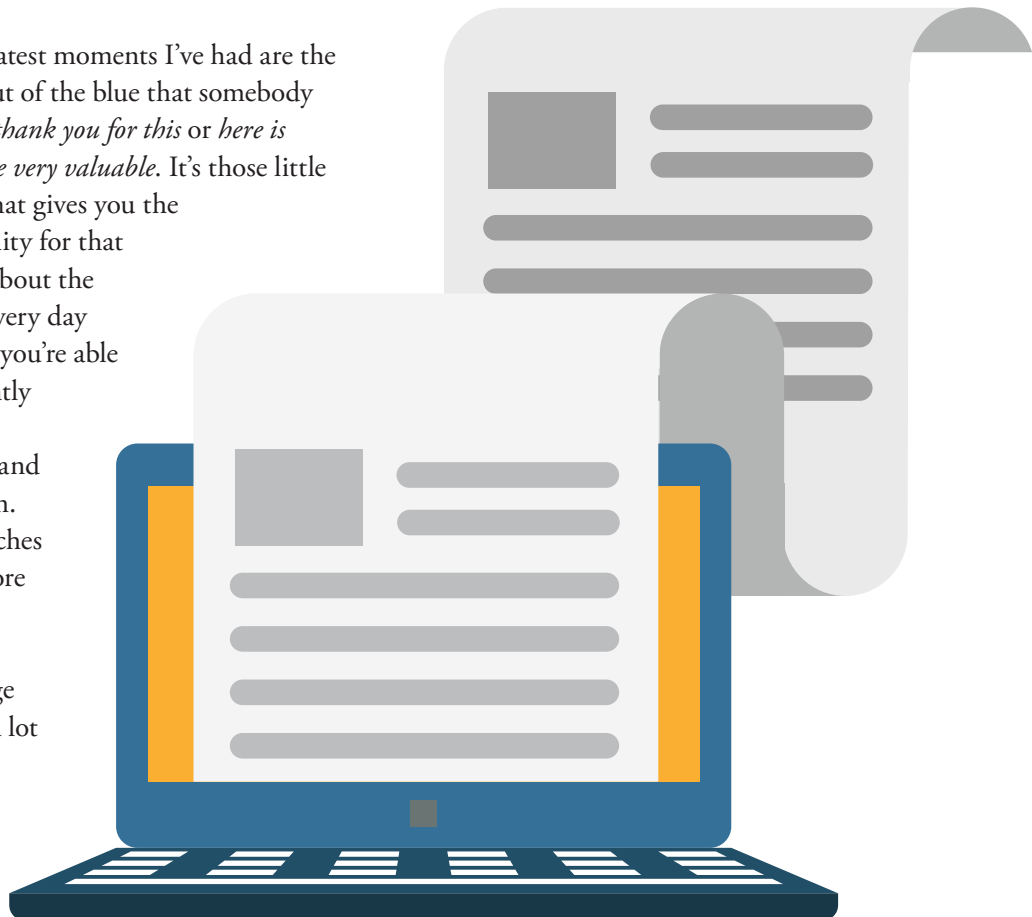
to care. They have to care about the purpose of the organization and they have to care about the people who are doing that. That goes hand-in-hand with being credible, and I am not sure you can train that.

Second thing is, a leader has to have integrity. They have to have personal integrity, they have to know who they are and be willing to hold themselves to their own standards. Then they have to be an exemplar of what they expect from their people. They have to live their values; they have to live up to their standards. It's like having kids. You can tell a child what to do, but if they don't see *you* doing it, they'll do it while you're watching but when you're not watching they're going to do what you do. So a leader has to be that example and understand you're always living in a glasshouse. Those things—credibility, caring, integrity, and being an exemplar, will allow your people to develop trust in you. I am a big believer that trust is something good leaders develop with the people in their organizations. That's an essential part of a culture in an effective organization and certainly in a military organization. There are times when we have to take very specific and high risks with the lives of our people. We've got to be able to trust each other and know that we're all in this for the right reasons.

★ I would love to hear about what you think is one of your greatest moments as a leader. Is there something that sticks out in your mind that you can share?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: Some of the greatest moments I've had are the small moments. I'll get an email or a card out of the blue that somebody obviously spent a lot of time writing, to say *thank you for this* or *here is something that you taught me that proved to be very valuable*. It's those little nuggets of feedback you get over the years that gives you the sense that, even if you don't get an opportunity for that one big grand moment, that maybe it's not about the big grand moment. It's about what you do every day with the people who work for you and what you're able to get your organization to achieve consistently that's enduring. Now, that said, I was a deployed commander—I did get my “big grand moment”. It was at the start of Iraqi Freedom. We tried to keep the timing of the first launches of the war under wraps, but a few hours before there was this electricity in the air. Everyone knew what was about to happen as the wing completed final preparations. This was a large wing that three different aircraft types and a lot of moving parts.

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I had left the command center to go over to the dining facility, and I was walking by a long row of large shipping containers that separated construction equipment from a common area. On the roofs of the containers were a whole lot of airmen who had climbed up there to watch the aircraft take off. Now these were all folks who were going to be on the night shift in just a few hours, but they were too eager to see the launch—to see the event that summed up why they were all far from home and living in the desert. Then as I went around to some of the other work areas I saw that, for example, if there were supposed to be 10 people working that day, there were now 14 or 15. They were all coming in off-shift on their own to make sure that everything was squared away. None of this extra work had been ordered, we were seeing an organization that was sensing and responding like a living organism, and it continued to do that for another five or six months.

★ I am going to ask the opposite question now. What would you say is one of the most difficult situations that you have faced as a leader?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: Well, it's always difficult when you have to discipline someone who is a friend, and in a military organization it's inevitable you're going to develop friendships and some those friendships will have developed years before you become someone's supervisor or commander. But the health of that unit—what we call “good order and discipline”—has got to come first. It goes back to that idea of trust. You cannot show favoritism, it has to be a meritocracy. So when people are out of line, you have to do what you can to put them back in line. Sometimes that's a difficult conversation, especially when you have to take administrative action that can affect a career. That has terminated friendships and is unfortunate, but that's the way it is.

Another challenge I've struggled with is the transfer of loyalty. Everybody works for somebody, and when I've had the boss that I report to leave and the new boss come in, that's always a challenging period for me as I transfer those loyalties, get on board with a new program and change the heading my organization may have been on because the new boss has a new vision. So some of that requires developing the leading-up skill set so you can, in a collegial and useful way, communicate with a new boss and start building a trust relationship with him or her.

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★ As a three star general for the United States, you have said that over the years you have had a lot of opportunities and a lot of situations to lead. Are there one or two lessons that really stand out to you as some of the most important characteristics of being a leader over the years?

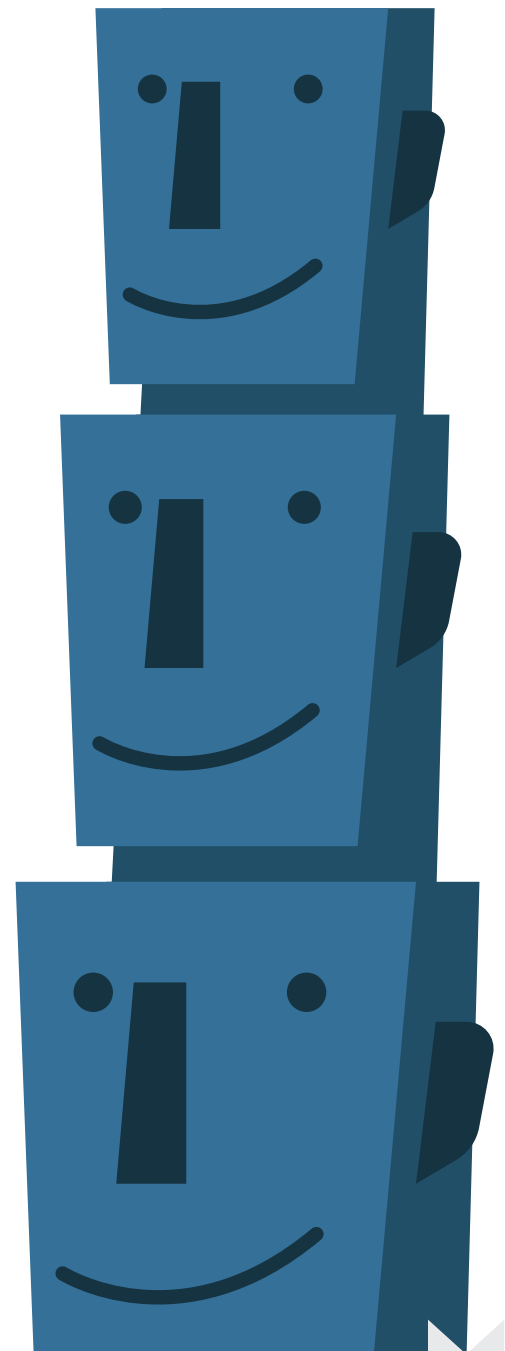
LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: Well, probably the first time I was in a formal command position. I was a squadron commander and there were about 550 people in the organization. It was a pretty large unit. I was very mission-focused at the time. I was interested in results. I had not developed an appreciation for the *people* part of our business, and the biggest lesson came from my wife. After I had been in the job for about three weeks I came home one day and she said *hey, I need to talk to you*. She said *you have to smile*. She was being dead serious. She told me I was just walking around all the time and thinking about 1,000 things and was not smiling at anybody. Like most advice I get from my wife, I instantly said, “You’re wrong.” But then, like I usually do, after I thought about it I realized she was right.

That lesson has stayed with me and I’ve passed it onto other people. It’s really important to set the tone and atmosphere for an organization by having the leadership smile. It’s just basic human nature and behavior to react positively to someone who smiles. So, if I am coming into the office and I feel like I’m behind and am becoming very task-focused, I pause for a second and I say *okay, it’s show time now*. It’s not about me; it’s about the people on my team, and I try to always come in there with a smile on my face. Now, I don’t always remember to do it, but I usually try to get there at some point in the day.

★ I love that. That’s a great lesson.

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: I think there is another one that I got from a senior commander I worked for. He said when you measure something, it improves. I’ve seen that time and again in my career, and it really is about, not only getting the leaders focused on something because they know their boss is measuring it, but letting your organization know that it’s important to you. So if you’re measuring something then your people at all levels know oh, this must be important. What can we do to make this better? So if you have the kind of organization that cares about what they do, they will respond to that on their own. The best example I have is back in the 1990s there was concern about the mission capable rate of the B-1 bomber. So Congress directed a test to see, if the Air Force got enough parts and people, we could meet the planned mission capable rate at one base.

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So the base they chose was Ellsworth Air Force Base. At the time I was a squadron commander at Dyess Air Force Base. They basically took personnel and parts from Dyess Air Force Base and moved them to Ellsworth Air Force Base to get Ellsworth Air Force Base's mission capable rate up. The Ellsworth Air Force Base mission capable rate over the period of the test, which I think was either six or nine months, exceeded the standard. So we proved the weapon system could be sustained if it had the right number of people and parts. What was not remarked upon in the report was the Dyess Air Force Base mission capable rate improved so much it just barely missed the standard despite having *lost* our parts and our people. That wing, because we now knew mission capable rate was important, figured out ways to hit the target. It was pretty impressive.

★ What do you think is a leader's role when it comes to the health and well-being of those they're leading? Do you think it's your job to ensure that they're healthy? What do you think your role is in their personal health?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: Well, the military is a unique organization so I am not sure how well what we do transfers to civilian organizations because, at the end of day, we have to ensure our military personnel are able to deploy to combat. So there are physical standards our military people have to maintain. The services test them to those standards, and if they don't meet the standards we put them in formal fitness programs to get them back to standards. If they continue to fail then they're separated from service. So basically they get fired. That's a little bit different than civilian organizations.

We do have traditional health and wellness programs on the installations. At our headquarters we have the Hallway Hiker program. Our building is so big you can walk a mile and a half by following the Hallway Hiker route. It's mapped out with signs on the wall to show where you walk to next.

If leaders want sound health programs, then it goes back to being the exemplar. If you think being fit and being healthy and having a healthy lifestyle are important to your organization and its goals and to your people, you need to be the example first. Don't be that overweight doctor with a cigarette in his hand telling you *hey, you have got to watch out; you have got hypertension*. You think *oh, okay thanks. How bad can it be if you're not following this advice?* So it's about being the example and about nudging and not nagging. So how do you nudge and not nag? Well, is there healthy food down in the cafeteria? Do you take the smoking areas and move them a little further away from the building? I mean, it's little things like that to get people to be sensitive to it.

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Pursuing physical activity is not something most people do. So how do you get them to do it? We have runs, we have a fitness center, we have annual fitness challenges and we try to keep the opportunities available for all our people and families, not just military members, to be more active and healthy.

★ Because in the military being healthy is directly tied to promotion and pay and success, do you think that people are naturally inclined to stay healthy and want to be healthier? Or is it your experience that some portion of your folks just don't care or give up? Do you see that too?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: Unfortunately I see it with some of our civilian workforce because they're not under those military standards. But even in the military force you will see people who live on that edge where they get themselves back in shape just in time for their fitness test, pass then lose the healthy habits until the next fitness test. It could be about what your personal standard is for being healthy and fit. Are you using body mass index? Weight? Run times? So we have people who meet our standards who don't look the way we would like them to look and are probably not leading the healthiest lives, but at the end of the day, people get to make their own choices. You set the lanes in the road for them, and as long as they're meeting minimum criteria then all you can do is try to capture them in the pool of people that you're nudging and not nagging.

★ Is the fitness test you're describing required once a year?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: It depends on how well you do. If you get an *excellent* it's once a year. If you *pass*, it's every six months. There are different standards for different services; this is for the Air Force.

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★ When you're faced with making an important decision, do you have a barometer that has guided you through your professional career?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: Well, the first thing is to understand the problem or the opportunity. In other words, what is driving the decision? I'm someone who does not need a whole lot of information to make a decision so I have to fight that impulse to just say *okay, this is what we're going to do* and instead force myself to spend time thinking about the problem or the opportunity. What guides me after that is trying to collect the data—what attributes I am looking for that will determine whether I am making the right decision. It depends on what kind of decision it is, but I ask whether there is a vision at the end of this for how things are supposed to look. I've also learned to apply some inverse logic of *what is the worst that can happen, or what outcome are we trying to avoid?* Try to turn the logic of a decision around a bit to give you a different perspective.

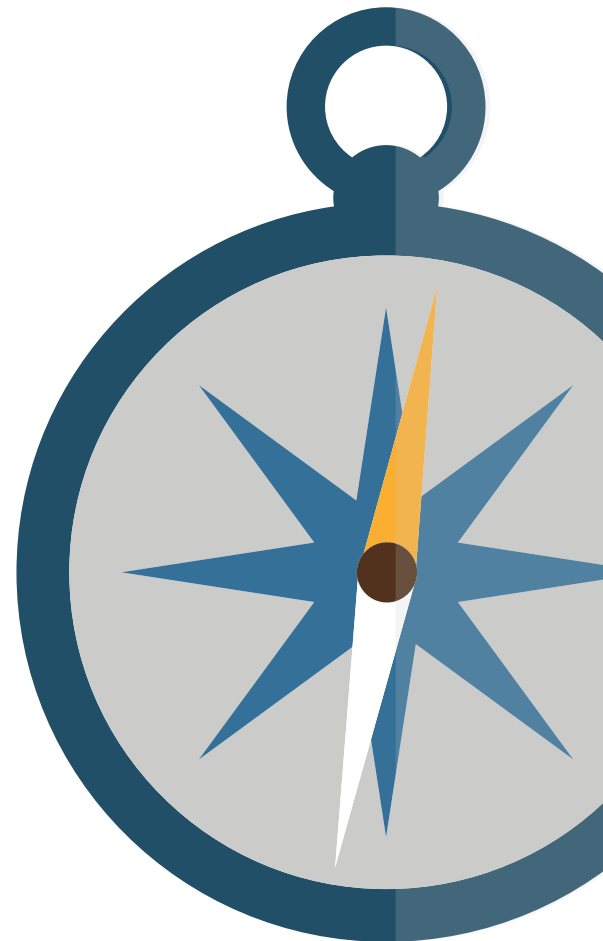
One thing I picked up from a general I worked for years ago was this idea of “regret factor,” especially if it's a yes/no decision. If I do it, what is the regret factor going to be if my assumptions are wrong? If I don't do it what is my regret factor going to be? What's the worst thing that could happen? Sometimes that thinking leads you to a different decision than you may have thought of originally. Clearly this can be applied to our discussion on personal lifestyle and fitness. The regret factor is pretty high if you think about some of the habit patterns we develop.

★ How do you motivate your team?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: I believe folks want three things from their leadership. The first thing is they just want to know what to do. Sometimes, believe it or not, we're not really clear. It's important to be clear on what it is you want them to do. You don't have to tell them *how* to do it, but giving them a sense of what this thing looks like at the end is important. Making sure there is a feedback loop is important too so they're comfortable asking questions, and they understand what you want them to do. The second thing is to train them to do it. We often forget that, especially as we bring in new systems, tools or processes to experienced employees. Sometimes we find ourselves giving people tasks they're not up to because we did not train them well enough, and then we're disappointed when they don't get the results we want. So we have to make sure we're meeting the needs of our people by giving them the right training to do the things that we're asking them to do.

Third, and probably most important, is to communicate to them why their work is important. Why is the thing that you're asking them to do, the thing that you're

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training them to do, why is it important to you, to the organization, to getting results, to their future, et cetera? Sometimes we miss that with the younger military members who join us. If they're not from a military family, a lot of cultural things we take for granted are things they may not understand.

So we have to spend more time with our new enlisted and the brand-new officers explaining to them how they fit into national security. For example, the security forces airman at the front gate has probably been on station for a year. Does he really know what he is protecting here on Offutt Air Force Base? Does he understand the command-and-control responsibilities? Does he understand all of the critical missions that the aircraft here do? Does he know that the big 747s on this installation are there to provide command-and-control to the President of the United States? Every once in a while when I go through the gate I'll ask them, and a lot of times they don't know. They know the functional details of their job but it's important to their morale and long-term development to understand how they fit into this bigger picture.

★ Yeah, that's great. Being able to connect employees to the purpose of the organization is really important.

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: It's the Simon Sinek start *with why* concept of making sure that it's not just mission-vision-values, but that we're working to help people understand the *why*. In the military, you look around and will find no mid-level folks that we just hired in from somewhere else. I mean, everybody wearing a uniform grows up in this system, so by the time you get to my seat you have a pretty good understanding of the *why* but you can be assured that most of us have forgotten how little of the *why* we knew when we first came in.

★ As you raise people up through the ranks, how do you convey the mission, vision, the culture, the *why* to them?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: Here at Strategic Command Headquarters we have an onboarding process but we have very few people whom you would consider brand-new. We're usually getting people from the field; they have done the mission for a while and now they're rotating into an assignment here at the headquarters. Our strategic missions tend to create a unique culture. The folks who come here understand we have a different focus and our priorities are different than other combatant commands, and that's as it should be. For example, at Central Command they're very focused on that geographic region. They're not watching the Pacific in great detail. Here we have a global focus. So we're watching everything, all the time, with special attention to high-end peer competitors and potential adversaries, Russia and China, and then those states that have uniquely dangerous capabilities such as North Korea.

It's the Simon Sinek ***start with why*** concept of making sure that it's not just **mission-vision-values**, but that we're working to help people understand the ***why.***



We're monitoring their behavior an, at the same time, maintaining the readiness of our forces so we continue to deter adversaries and assure allies.

So our onboarding here tends to be more training-focused on our specific systems and how our processes work. We're using multiple different IT systems to get the operational and administrative work done here in the headquarters. We also teach them about the headquarters role, the other organizations we work with, and how the organizations are related and where each of them fits.

★ I want to get your thoughts on rewards and penalties. When do you think it's important to use rewards to change behaviors and do you use rewards and/or penalties to motivate or discourage behaviors?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: The Department of Defense certainly does use monetary incentives, and it's something that has become increasingly prevalent over my career. The civilian leadership in the department has used financial rewards more and more to shape the force, to keep people in certain career fields and to encourage people to stay by using various enlistment bonuses or time of service bonuses—those types of things. What we have seen is the power those incentives have to drive behaviors in folks and shape our force.

Monetary awards have been effective for the department in terms of managing personnel, but we don't have the latitude to use them at smaller organizational levels. Within a squadron or a battalion, we don't offer financial rewards for performance so we use recognition rewards. We have Soldier of the Year or Airman of the Year. We also have unit awards like the best B-52 squadron award or the best nuclear submarine award. This type of recognition is important to the people in that unit and it helps them appreciate why their job is important and how their team fits in the larger picture.

When we do surveys of our force, one thing consistently brought up is people feel like they don't get recognized for their work. Inevitably, we then think *oh, gee we need another recognition program, another annual award*. I don't think that's what folks really want. They're not usually looking for another annual award in their specific category. What they're looking for is their supervisor to give them a pat on the back and recognize them for the work that they did, especially when it's above and beyond.

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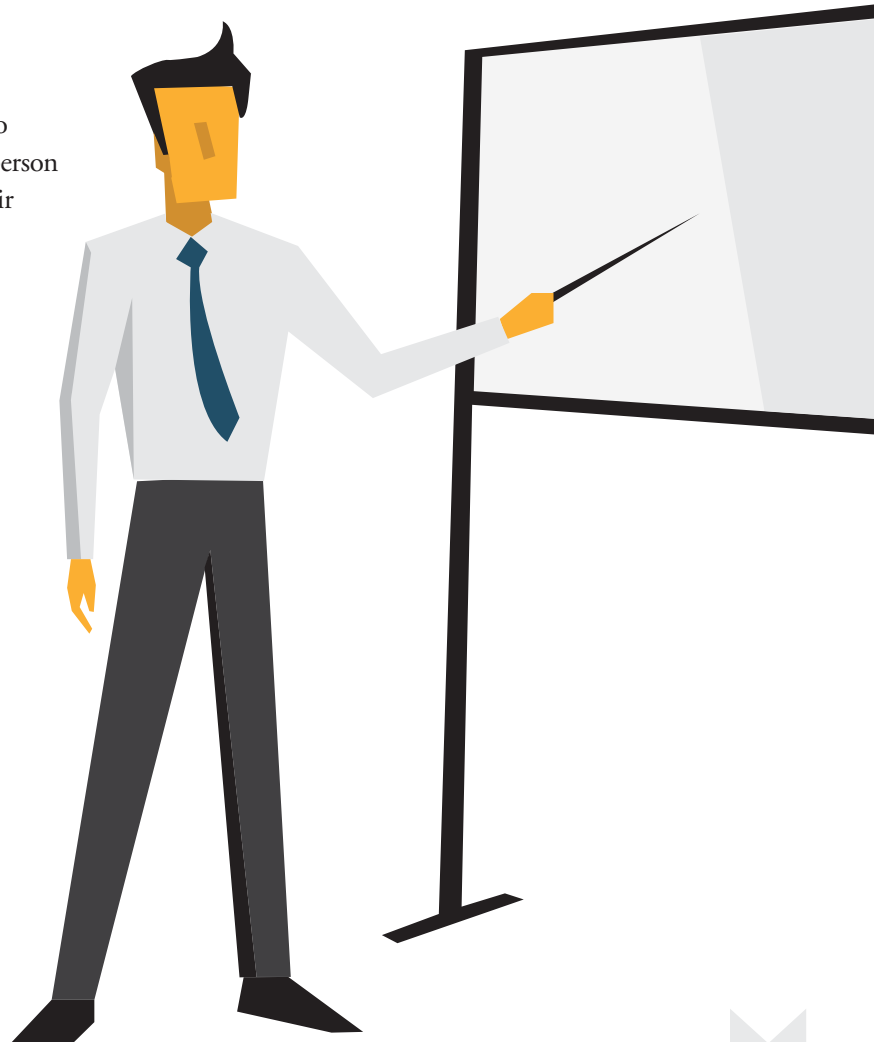


In the military you don't have strict set hours, you respond to the mission. So if somebody is coming in early and staying late, there is no overtime pay for that, and if they do it long enough and nobody says *hey, thanks*, they begin to wonder why they're doing it. So it's important for supervisors to give that pat on the back. It's the least expensive, and usually the most powerful, form of recognition as long as it's timely, direct and focused on something very specific the person did. It's even better if you can do it publicly, but at the end of the day, a lot of times you just need to give them a pat on the back.

★ That would be a good example of delivering positive feedback to someone. How do you deliver negative feedback?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: I am a big believer in positive feedback, and I am lukewarm on negative feedback. No matter how good it sounds to give people honest feedback on their performance, it's a very difficult thing to do well and it requires a lot of trust and a strong relationship. There is some research that shows the results from critical feedback tend to be mixed. So I prefer to use more positive feedback and if I have to give negative feedback, I will wrap it in some coaching. For example, say, *"another way we have done X is like this;"* or say *"we find we get better results by doing it this way."*

It's more about giving negative feedback in a positive manner as opposed to *here are the three things you did wrong*. If you're too negative, or focused on person and not performance, then the person spends the next day stewing over it and then they're writing their resume because they think you don't trust them anymore or they worry about the relationship they have with you. I've been able to give negative feedback, and in our structured feedback sessions negative feedback is sometimes appropriate. Usually though, if I've given somebody negative feedback they know they got it, but hopefully they don't walk away feeling like I raked them over the coals or that they're failures. That doesn't help the organization. This, of course, is in terms of general performance. When someone does something inconsistent with our values or our regulations, the uniform code of military justice applies, and that feedback is something very different.



There is some research that shows the **results from critical feedback tend to be mixed**. So I prefer to use more **positive feedback** and **if I have to give negative feedback, I will wrap it in some coaching.**”

★ If I were to ask one of your teammates to describe your leadership, what do you think they would say about your leadership style?

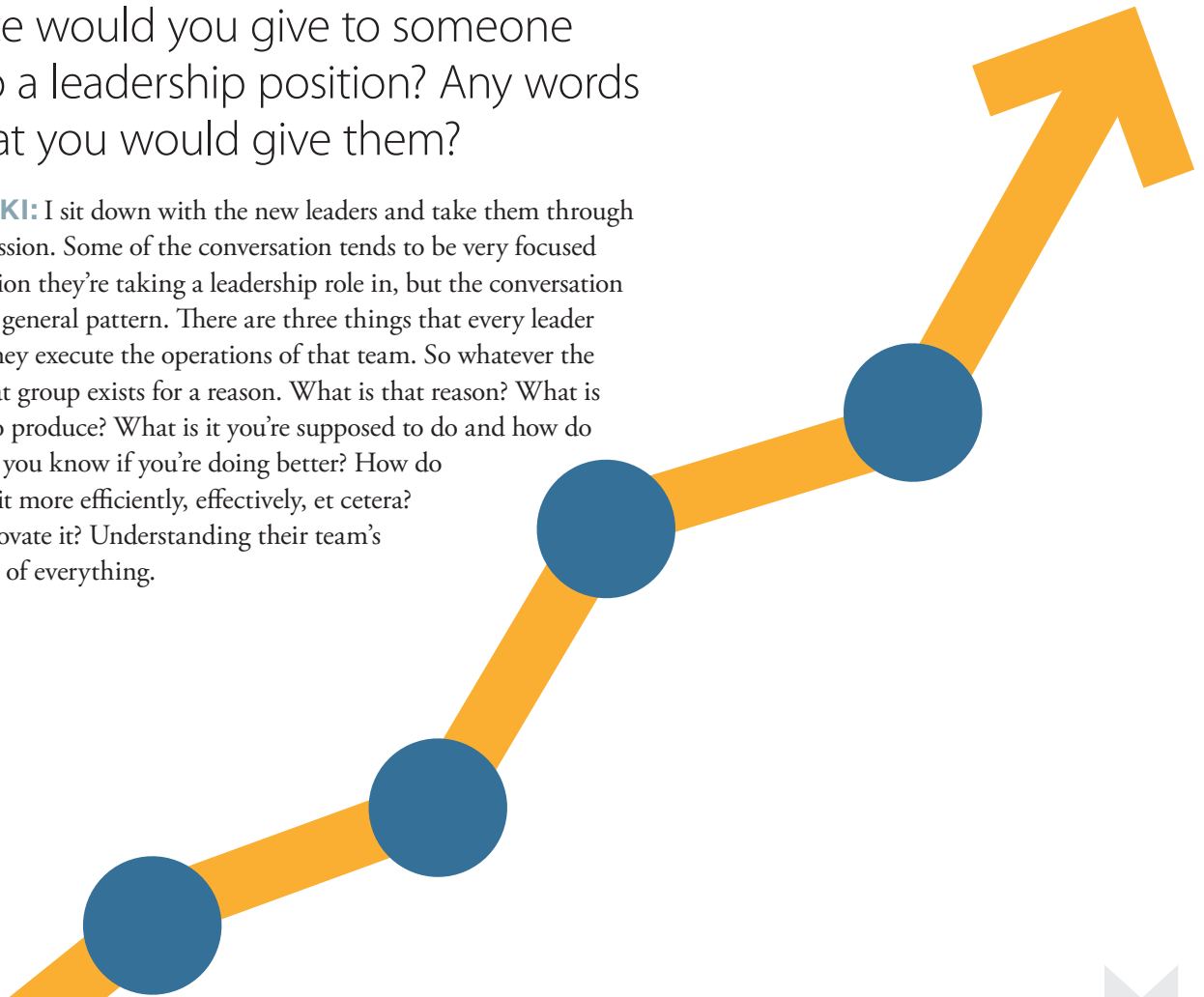
LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: You know, I don't know. I suspect there is nobody in my office who really hates coming to work because I am their boss. But it's not something I've thought about. I would say the way to measure that is to look at the long term performance of the organization. If you have an organization that's performing well and is continuing to improve then you probably have a pretty solid leader in place. Now there are always caveats to that, such as leaders who are getting short term success on the backs of their people.

But I don't spend too much time worrying about beauty contests; it's more about what am I doing for them? If I were worrying about what they thought of me then it might be integrity-damaging. Would I then be more inclined to do things to make them happy when those things may not be best for the organization? It's best for folks to have a leader who is consistent, who is steady in both mood and expectations. I don't want the team wondering *what are our priorities today? Or, which General Kowalski is coming to work today?*

★ What advice would you give to someone who is new to a leadership position? Any words of wisdom that you would give them?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: I sit down with the new leaders and take them through at least a half hour discussion. Some of the conversation tends to be very focused on the specific organization they're taking a leadership role in, but the conversation always follows this same general pattern. There are three things that every leader does. The first thing is they execute the operations of that team. So whatever the group you're leading, that group exists for a reason. What is that reason? What is it that you're supposed to produce? What is it you're supposed to do and how do you measure it? How do you know if you're doing better? How do you know if you can do it more efficiently, effectively, et cetera? How do you plan to innovate it? Understanding their team's operations is at the heart of everything.

“If you have an organization that's **performing well** and is **continuing to improve** then you probably have a **pretty solid leader in place.**”



The next part essential to leadership is personnel. Whether you have two people assigned to you or 200, who are they? When you get into larger organizations, what is their demographic? How does that demographic change the workplace? What kind of demands does it put on you to make sure you have got the right infrastructure, that you're communicating with them the right way, those kinds of things? Then how do you teach, train and develop them as they go forward? Then of course within that group one thing I do believe about leadership is the number one job of a leader is to create more leaders. So how are you identifying those high potential people and developing them into leaders?

The third piece is strategy. A small organization may not have a big strategic role but what we're really talking about is whether you have a vision for your organization. Is it to do exactly what you doing right now five years from now? Or do you have an organization where you really can develop the strategy and you can talk about where you want to be? *Here is how is how I want this to look. Here is the culture we need. Here is what I want our facilities to be like.* And really think about how you get there. So the first piece I give new leaders is that three-piece framework to think about their role.

I also talk about traditional leadership elements. You have to have credibility, you have to care, you need integrity and you must be an example to your folks. Part of being a good example is never walking past a problem, always maintaining standards, those kinds of things. I also tell them that you can't lead anyone from your computer. You have got to be out there with your people. You have to be out there in your organizations showing your face, reminding them why what they do is important, reminding them of that larger vision of the organization.

And the last thing I tell leaders is to not jump into your changes right away. Sometimes people will come to a job and they have been familiar with it for a while and they already know what they want to do, but I always encourage folks to just sit back for the first few weeks. You never learn anything by talking so go out and listen to your folks, listen to your peers, reach out to other people who have had this job, reach out to people who have had a job like this but maybe in a completely different part of the military. Because once you stand up in front of your group and *say okay, here is what we're doing*, you have committed them to a path.

★ Are there any resources that have been particularly beneficial or important to you that you would recommend for new leaders whether it be books or other types of things that have been important or instrumental in your leadership?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: I think that if somebody is listening to this or reading it then they're already on the path to recognizing that leadership is a profession. Just like you would not want to go to a doctor who stopped studying medicine after he

...One thing I do believe about leadership is the number one job of a leader is to create more leaders. ”



got his diploma, you really don't want a leader who stopped thinking about leadership after they got their first leadership position. So our understanding of leadership, our understanding of human behavior, our understanding of organizational behavior is constantly evolving and growing, and I think those are areas that anybody who takes leadership seriously needs to keep up with. It's important to go beyond the "seven best things a leader can do". Social media is interesting but it tends to be a lot of snapshots of really obvious things. There is value in some of that if it makes you think, but there is more lasting value in spending more time reading or watching things that explore a subject deeply than on these little nuggets that get laid out there.

One reference I use fairly frequently is Harvard Business Review. The articles can often lead you to authors of subjects as opposed to just reading the three-minute article and then thinking you now understand something. There are a couple of books I go to regularly; one of them is called *Rules and Tools for Leaders*. I discovered checklists when I started flying airplanes and found they fit my personality, so I use checklists for a whole lot of things. This is a book that gives leader checklists for any number of activities from taking a new job, to firing somebody, to hiring somebody. I keep it on the shelf and every time I've got to do one of those things, I pull out this book and it helps me focus my thoughts.

Grant's memoirs is another great book that shows leadership without putting it front and center. Grant doesn't give you the "10 things every great leader does," but you can draw deep leadership lessons from his story. I'd add the Dale Carnegie book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. I have that on tape and also in hardcover, and I either read it or listen to it every year because it reminds me that everybody is better than me at something. I tend toward introversion, and the Dale Carnegie book reminds me that if I want the organization to be effective, I've got to be reaching out and I've got to be engaging with people more. So those are just some of the resources I've found helpful. But really I think people just need to explore the subject that their gut tells them to explore and try to do it in a more detailed way than reading summaries. Just block the time and do it.

I think that if somebody is listening to this or reading it then they're **already on the path to recognizing that leadership is a profession.** Just like you would not want to go to a doctor who stopped studying medicine after he got his diploma, **you really don't want a leader who stopped thinking about leadership after they got their first leadership position.**

★ Is there anything else that we did not cover that you think it's important we include in this conversation?

LT. GEN. KOWALSKI: Probably the only other thing I would add about leadership is it really is about change. If leadership was not about change then we could send somebody to the fast food institute, they could learn how to run the fry line and then all they would have to do is run their version of the fry line for the rest of their career. But we know that's not how the world works. Technology changes, your competitors change, your workforce changes, your leadership team changes, your investors change, the financial environment changes, your customers change. You have to be able to adapt to all those changes, and if you're not always thinking about change and improvement, then you're really not leading your people. People resist change, that's just human behavior. Change requires energy and we have evolved to save energy. You have to lead people through changes, and if you think of yourself as a change leader and build credibility in change leadership, that becomes part of the relationship with your team, and they tend to be more amenable to you leading them through change.

But if you're the person who's with them at the water cooler saying, *yeah, this is the stupidest thing we have ever done. I don't know why we're going in this direction.* Guess what? You're not going to be able to get them to follow you when you're told you have to do this. Change is tough for everybody, but it's important for leaders to be open to change so they can take their organization to the next level.

You have to be able to **adapt to all those changes**, and if you're not **always thinking about change and improvement**, then you're really **not leading your people.**”

General Kowalski's Reading List

1. **Strategic Command Reading List**
http://www.stratcom.mil/reading_list/
2. **The Complete Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant**
<http://www.amazon.com/Complete-Personal-Memoirs-Ulysses-Grant/dp/1438297076>
3. **How to Win Friends and Influence People**
<http://www.amazon.com/How-Win-Friends-Influence-People/dp/1508569754>
4. **Rules and Tools for Leaders**
<http://www.amazon.com/Rules-Tools-Leaders-Developing-Organizations/dp/0399163514>
5. **Harvard Business Review**
<https://hbr.org/>
6. **Execution: the Discipline of Getting Things Done**
<http://www.amazon.com/Execution-Discipline-Getting-Things-Done/dp/0609610570>



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