

APPLYING MILITARY LEADERSHIP TO EVERYDAY LIFE

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The military's focus on continual leadership development is a key lesson to carry into civilian life.

Why do men die? A rather bleak thought. Death. Many people are afraid to die—perhaps due to fear of the unknown or regret of times past. For one reason or another, human beings are hard-wired to avoid death. You could say it is in our DNA. The very concept of self-preservation is the reason why there is a human race today. Said Major Sullivan Ballou, in a letter written to his wife during the American Civil War:

I cannot describe to you my feelings on this calm summer night, when two thousand men are sleeping around me, many of them enjoying the last, perhaps, before that of death—and I, suspicious that Death is creeping behind me with his fatal dart, am communing with God, my country, and thee. (1861)

He died one week later at the First Battle of Bull Run. Shaking off the desire for self-preservation and running head-long into danger, knowing that death is a possibility, is characteristic of a soldier. Now, why do men die? For many the answer varies, but for those in the military the answers are more concise with focuses on the ideals of country, liberty, and honor. For those where death is a probable possibility, the importance of outstanding leadership cannot be emphasized enough. Many have answered the call to lead. Throughout history, armed conflict has produced some of the greatest leaders ever. To face death individually requires courage and fortitude, but to lead men and women to possible death, and maintain composure, separates a true leader from the

average individual. With war as the school and conflict as the class, men and women have risen above the average person to become great leaders, impacting human history in drastic ways. By studying what it is that makes such great leaders, the average person can be transformed in such a way as to positively impact both themselves and society.

Applying the lessons learned from military service to everyday life can appear, at first glance, to be a difficult task. There are many differences, viewed as obstructions, for comparing how a service member and a normal citizen operate on a day-to-day basis. However, it is not so different. Much of the business world utilizes military training and developmental techniques in order to foster a more effective workforce. Sports teams sometimes travel to military installations to utilize the facilities for team and confidence building (Chiusano, 2016). After establishing an appropriate mindset, the ability to adapt military leadership training techniques to the civilian lifestyle can be accomplished with ease.

The need for effective leaders can be seen in all areas, especially within the workplace and in academics. The U.S. military has been successfully producing leaders for over two hundred years. Even before the formation of the United States, military experiences produced outstanding leaders who made great advances in their respective civilizations. With historical and modern examples of extraordinary leadership as a result of military training, a study of how this is done and its application to the average individual can help anyone in any profession become a better, more effective leader.

For the everyday professional, leadership can sometimes be in short supply; for members of the military it is a process of everyday life. Tom Kolditz, in the *Harvard Business Review*, lists three reasons why military service produces outstanding leaders. He states:

First, in all services, military leadership qualities are formed in a progressive and sequential series of carefully planned training, educational, and experiential events—far more time-consuming and expensive than similar training in industry or government. Secondly, military leaders tend to hold high levels of responsibility and authority at low levels of our organizations. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, military leadership is based on a concept of duty, service, and self-sacrifice; we take an oath to that effect. (2009, p.1)

These processes and methodologies for the development of leaders are in practice on a day-to-day basis. Young men and women, some as young as seventeen, begin this

process from day one. The types of leaders described above are individuals who are developed to lead soldiers in combat where they must put off the natural instincts of self-preservation and run head-on into danger and possible death. Tom Kolditz summarizes this well by writing:

When serving in crisis conditions where leadership influences the physical well-being or survival of both the leader and the led—in *extremis* contexts—transactional sources of motivation (e.g. pay, rewards, or threat of punishment) become insufficient. . . . Soldiers in such circumstances must be led in ways that inspire, rather than require, trust and confidence. When followers have trust and confidence in a charismatic leader, they are transformed into willing, rather than merely compliant, agents. (2009, p. 1)

As leaders, military commanders understand that to lead soldiers toward accomplishing seemingly impossible tasks, it is important to inspire and build a trusting relationship. This is what led George Washington to lead his troops to Valley Forge and General Douglas MacArthur to lead a successful Pacific Campaign in World War II. They understood how to inspire those that followed them and in this way were able to obtain victories and win their respective wars.

Producing a leader that soldiers will follow into battle involves an extensive process that takes weeks-to-years to develop. This process is never truly complete. Within the United States Army there is a series of courses spanning anywhere from three weeks to three months which an enlisted soldier must complete to be promoted (HRC, 2016). This process begins within a year and a half of when a soldier enters the Army. Leadership is instilled early in the career and continual development is required for promotion. Within the civilian sector, courses offered by employers or academic institutions similarly instill leadership qualities within an individual for application in the workplace. The focus of continual leadership development is a key lesson to be taken from the military and implemented by the appropriate “civilian” counterparts within their organizations or for personal development. Historically, many great military leaders did not gain their experience in one event. George Washington lost the Battle at Fort Mifflin and fought multiple skirmishes in the French and Indian War, which led him to become a decisive and expert leader during the American Revolution (Washington, G., [1785]). Through continual leadership training, a professional in any field can become a leader and effect change for a positive, lasting impact on their organization and peers.

The training received through military service can be transferred to success in academics and the civilian workforce in several ways. First, an individual who has military training has learned a particular skill set involving creativity, risk-taking, and adaptability (Monaghan, 2016). In both the university and the workforce, such a skill set fosters the ability to advance in any field. This is because as society evolves and technology transforms, the CEOs, managers, and leaders of tomorrow need to have the ability to adapt and creatively evolve to meet society's needs. The military teaches these skills. If such training were applied in schools and the current workforce, many more people would not only be better able to handle this societal evolution, but would also be able to lead others in research and production, advancing society further.

The second way in which military service can be transferred to success in everyday life is the personable skills and mutual respect that the military culture fosters. Within the military there is a specified rank structure where respect is required for those of higher rank. This is beneficial because it teaches a "respect for the rank as distinct from the man" (Learn to be a Leader, 2009). In everyday life there are teachers, supervisors, and any number of individuals who hold positions deserving respect. In today's society, respect is very hard to find. The mentality is shifting to a more internal, self-caring philosophy with little concern for the welfare or respect of others. Within military service, a respect for position and an "obedience to orders" (Learn to be a Leader, 2009) is the norm and is a necessary skill to have to be successful in everyday life. By applying these philosophies of respect and obedience to superiors in the confines of everyday life, true leaders are revealed. As Aristotle stated, "He who cannot be a good follower cannot be a good leader" (Lowell, 2016). Military service provides leaders with the opportunity to be followers and in so doing assists them in becoming the leaders of tomorrow.

Military leadership skills and training can translate to success in everyday life, not only for the individual, but also for the organization. Businesses and academic institutions need individuals who are motivated and dedicated; the military instills these attributes within every soldier, airman, and seaman. Within military training, a major focus is placed on "attention to detail" (Efron, 2014), a skill that businesses and organizations conducting research require. This is not the only task that military training, service, and leadership experience instills. Other such applicable skill sets include, intelligence gathering, "planning and preparation," the execution of a plan, "team leadership," and the development of subordinates (Stolie, 2010). The application of these skills can come to benefit not only the service member but also those around them.

To apply this to a university setting, think of a research project for a class or in conjunction with a professor. As the project progresses, that service member applies military leadership skills of gathering intelligence, formulating a reasonable goal or objective, and then planning to achieve that objective. As a result of the constant change of military life, the former military leader not only anticipates change or potential issues, but looks to use “it to the advantage” (Corbett, 2015) of the project or group. This makes the process of executing the plan much easier because of the foresight granted by experience. As the project progresses, issues are resolved swiftly and efficiently as a result of military training that focused on attention to detail. At the conclusion of the project a presentation of the results is necessary and as a result of military leadership training, this former service member can assist in preparing and giving a clear and concise reporting of the results. This is just one example of how military leadership training can translate to success in an everyday situation. There are many others, and the skills learned from military leadership and experience can be applied to all of them.

As one generation leads to another, styles and techniques of leadership must change. This evolution in generations has led to the increased need for an evolution in leadership development and styles. Reviewing military history, such changes are evidenced in the rise of new technologies and physical training techniques that produce more proficient and effective soldiers and leaders. Even with this change, the general principles of leadership development and training have remained the same, so much so that newly enlisted soldiers receive a copy of “The Blue Book” containing basic information in line with the original book of the same name published in 1779 by General Friedrich Von Steuben for the Continental Army in the American Revolutionary War (Shay, 2009). This dedication and focus to basic techniques and practices, exemplified across all branches, has allowed the military to maintain a strong foundation in leadership development while adding training modules and other techniques for different generations of soldiers. Applicably, for an organization or academic institution, leadership must be instilled utilizing a foundation and then expounded. Many times, courses are offered that present the latest and greatest in ideologies. However, without any proper foundation these techniques can be forgotten and are difficult to understand and connect together. By establishing a leadership foundation rooted in experience and success and then building off of that, organizations and individuals can in turn grow and adapt to ever changing social and demographic environments.

In reference to the question posed at the beginning of this paper, some attention must be given to the inspiration leaders provide. In today’s culture it can appear that

everyone has a boss who does not exemplify the ideal leader. In a combat situation this type of leader becomes ineffective and the results can be disastrous and catastrophic. As such, the military has developed a system of leadership promoting the building of trust and teamwork in order to accomplish a task. If a soldier is going to contain the natural urge of self-preservation and run into battle, then the fight must be for something greater than fear or payment because eventually these factors will not be enough to motivate those individuals. Said Maj. Sullivan Ballou:

I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans upon the triumph of the Government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government, and to pay that debt. (1861)

To inspire men and women to go to battle willing to fight and possibly die is one of the strongest indicators of a great leader. This inspiration comes through leading from the front and becoming an example others want to follow. It can apply to anyone in any location, whether the workplace, school, or even the home. To inspire and lead by example is a trait few can master effectively, but when done, people will follow that leader to the ends of the earth and back again. The military is a prime example of this trait, and the applications and implications of such leadership are so vast that nations have and will rise and fall based on such leadership.

By applying the lessons learned from military service, current and future leaders can apply and grow, both themselves and those around them. Within the military, men and women lay down their lives for ideals. They willingly follow their superiors into combat knowing they might not survive. Yet they still push onward, trusting their leaders and their cause. Looking to the example of military leadership, people everywhere can learn and grow. If these lessons were applied to a greater degree, think of what could be accomplished and how this world would be. From the darkest places of humanity, in the armed conflicts of the world, rise some of the greatest leaders known to man. Though many will not serve in such a role, the lessons learned are so important that when applied they can have the effect so as to change the very course of humanity itself. Death is not the end because the actions of today will affect the lives of many tomorrow. This is what so many have died for, and this is what all human beings should live for.

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