

# LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

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*The Centre for Army Leadership (CAL) is the British Army's custodian of leadership debate, thinking and doctrine. It seeks to stimulate discussion about leadership and to further the institution's knowledge of best practice and experience. **Leadership Insights** are published periodically by the CAL to feed and shape the leadership debate within the Army through a range of themes and ideas designed to inform and challenge its readership. The views expressed in the **CAL Leadership Insights** are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official thinking of the British Army or the Ministry of Defence.*

## Developing Junior Leaders

### Actions and Attributes<sup>1</sup>

*by WO2 Lovell Cadet (PWRR)*

My understanding of leadership, and how I perceive and practice leadership, is centred around the impact, imprint, and influences from the leaders around me. In my view, every person who puts on the uniform is a leader. I do not say this lightly or condescendingly. The commitment it takes to sign on and make it through training shows key leadership qualities. In my career, I have learnt lessons in leadership from service personnel across the entire rank spectrum and particularly from what we call the Junior Leader space, which is something I want to discuss in this CAL Insight.

Our aim as soldiers is to achieve the end goal of our organisation: to fight and win wars on land. To do this, we must be operationally effective, high performing, and highly professional. As leaders, we must be able to lead authentically as ourselves whilst being prepared to operate and lead in a manner that is understood by all the people we are leading. Leadership is about understanding and being understood. As leaders, we must take into consideration the effect that we have on our people through everything we say and everything we do. We must be aware of the lasting positive – and sometimes negative – impact we can have on those around us and the effect that this has on our organisation.

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<sup>1</sup> This CAL Leadership Insight is based on WO2 Lovell Cadet's presentation at the CAL Conference on *Developing Junior Leaders*, 2 Dec 22.

To do so, we must think again about leadership as a set of activities and attributes and how they shape us as leaders.

### **Leadership Action**

In my view, there are three fields of action on which leaders must focus: Develop your people; Set the priorities; Be the catalyst for action.

Developing people starts during the recruitment process and continues throughout our careers. First of all, we must ensure that we attract the right people. Recruits must come from a diverse background and from all walks of life. Developing our people requires an inclusive culture, which values diverse ideas, empowers initiative at all levels, and allows everyone to grow and reach their full potential.

It is not uncommon for conversations surrounding diversity and inclusion to be met with groans and rolling eyes. However, to fight and to win wars on land, we must have operationally effective and highly professional teams who feel valued and connected to the organisation. Diversity and inclusion are therefore essential to make the Army fit for purpose, adaptable and flexible. Diversity must be a business imperative and not merely a policy.

A key challenge for the Army is to find the right balance between focusing on high performance or on highly professional teams. There is a risk that the relentless drive and aspiration for high performance may drive toxic leadership behaviours. Highly professional teams can potentially be both high performing and support operational effectiveness without negatively impacting on our people. Hence, I would like to shift the focus from high performing teams to highly professional teams.

When the right people are recruited, they need to be trained and this training must offer diverse and wide-ranging experiences. The current training establishments and promotion models already deliver this to an extent. The development of the Soldier and NCO Academies will provide more focused and structured emphasis on soldier development, which is welcome.

As a leader, having the ability to draw trusted perspectives from the right people to inform and challenge is essential. This can take many forms like informal contacts with other leaders, in-service mentoring programs, and the Army's staff support networks, just to mention a few. It is important to always keep an open mind and to be able to have difficult conversations with a wide range of leaders about issues we either do not understand, that are sensitive or that may make us uncomfortable. These conversations are opportunities to unpack complex issues, to understand new ideas, and to get to know different leadership styles. An emerging term used to describe this process is 'Courageous Conversations'. It frames the concept of having the courage to promote discussion around sensitive topics to raise everyone's levels of awareness and understanding despite our tendency to avoid taboo topics and uncomfortable situations. In seeking to develop our subordinates and peers and in getting to know them, we implicitly develop ourselves.

Another critical thing that leaders do is to set individual and team priorities that are tied to their organisation's priorities. A good leader assesses the framework [the 'why'] to which their organisation operates, and the goals the organisation aims to achieve. Leaders define how they and their people fit in the framework and how they contribute to the achievement of these goals. This could be the start of stakeholder engagement, including colleagues at all levels, and of the development of a more advanced understanding of the organisation.

Setting priorities must go hand in hand with effective communication, in-depth subject matter knowledge, and the understanding of the operational context. In the Army, I believe, we are good at setting priorities on deployment and exercise and at communicating them in our formal orders process. A Commander's 'Intent' is carefully crafted to reflect the chain of command's priorities - it is simple and communicated widely. It is also supported by the Main Effort - doctrinally repeated twice for emphasis. However, I would suggest that in barracks we lose this sense of clear direction. Some leaders may still commit to prioritisation, but they often fail to communicate their goals and priorities sufficiently frequently and clearly for subordinates to fully grasp and understand them.

Catalysts to action can vary according to the structure and culture of the organisation. But there is always the requirement to have the clear and visible commitment of the leader before delegating to subordinates and peers. To quote US Army General Colin Powell, "Leaders put followers in the best possible environment to accomplish a mission. It works in any endeavour in the world where humans come together to achieve a purpose." To me, this means practicing what you preach and set the examples of the workplace culture required or desired by the organisation.

In the Army, teamwork looks to build on this catalysing action. Unfortunately, listening to and empowering Service Personnel can at times be overridden by our rank structures. However, we know that when Service Personnel are consulted, during planning and development of an action, they feel valued as key stakeholders to the organisational outputs. This has an enormous impact on morale and performance.

### **Leadership Attributes**

In my view, there are four common attributes of leadership: Ambition, Clarity, Humility, and Authenticity.

According to Joan Marques, "Ambition fuels creativity, shapes thinking, and fosters an entrepreneurial spirit. It is a powerful leadership quality." The double-edged nature of ambition, however, means that it can have positive as well as negative effects. For example, ambition can be associated with a sense of entitlement and can drive self-serving behaviours that foster mistrust in others. Ambition may also have negative effects because of individuals 'skipping steps' and setting unattainable goals. In my view, quiet ambition is often stronger than open ambition. I believe that it is important to anchor ambition to the Army's Values. Selfless commitment, in particular, is essential. It implies a focus on the people whom you are working to and with, and on what you believe in. The selflessly committed do not make a show of their ambitious pursuits.

Leadership requires simplicity through clarity. Good leaders are reflective, which means they can be present in the moment and find meaning from experience. Clarity also means clarity of thought and in communication, which are essential to inspire our people to act, have the ability to narrow down complex problems to their basics and then present them clearly in order to motivate our people to act.

I also feel that humility is the essential characteristic of outstanding leadership. In a conversation with Mark Carney, John Bullivant argued that "good leaders combine personal humility, self-knowledge, and the ability to learn. It means admitting mistakes, seeking and accepting feedback, and sharing the lessons". When leaders admit their flaws, they acknowledge that they are on a path of continuous self-improvement. They can admit

they have failed and turn their failures in learning opportunities for themselves and for others. Humility opens a space where people build trust and can relate.

Authenticity requires humility and sincerity. Being authentic means doing what you say, and people knowing who you are. This includes what you believe in, what motivates you, as well as your strengths and most importantly your weaknesses. Decisions will be easier to follow if people know and trust what you stand for.

Ambition. Clarity. Authenticity. Humility. In the words of Mark Carney, “Not all of these qualities are ever visible in any leader, certainly never at the same time. But if you keep them in mind, they will be seeds that the exercise of leadership will germinate. And their growth will benefit both you as the leader and those you lead.”

### **Conclusion**

Being a leader does not mean you have made it and have nothing left to learn. Rather, leadership is a discipline that requires continuous commitment, practice, and improvement. The development of the leadership attributes will benefit both you as the leader and those under your command. I urge leaders to challenge their own biases and seek to inform and understand other perspectives and positions.

In the Army, we utilise the seven questions estimate to understand how we are to deliver a level of effect but ultimately the delivery of effect comes to its full realisation when we focus and give appropriate time to understanding. The understand function must focus on our objectives as well as on our people. When we understand how our people operate, then we understand how to best lead them. Understanding our people, allows us to draw value from them. We must deliver something as intangible as self-worth, delivering a feeling, a feeling of belonging, a feeling of inclusion, a feeling which ultimately equates to value. We allow our people to be their true selves at work and to achieve their best for themselves, their team and their organisation.

### **Questions**

1. Have we got the tools to reach a level of understanding which allows our service personnel to deliver maximum affects and value?
2. What place does vulnerability have in leadership?
3. Can you think of an example in which diversity has boosted performance in your team?
4. Is humility essential in building trust?
5. What do you want your leaders to get from you?

### **Resources**

CAL Conference on *Developing Junior Leaders*, 2 Dec 22. Full recording available at:

[Developing Junior Leaders: Centre For Army Leadership Conference 2022 - YouTube](#)

Carney, M., *Value(s): Building a Better World for All* (Hatchett, 2021).

Gallo, C., [Colin Powell's Best Communication Advice For Motivating Teams \(forbes.com\)](#), 19 Oct 21.

Marques, J., “Leadership and Ambition.” *Leadership Today*, 2017.

Zuo, L. et al. “Reckless Ambition: How Impulsivity Moderates the Effect of Ambition on Transformational Leadership.” *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 187 (Mar 22).