



LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

No 19 – Jan 2020

*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 so 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 in the Army through a range of themes and ideas designed to inform and challenge its readership. The views expressed in **Leadership Insights** are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official thinking of the British Army or the Ministry of Defence.*

How Does My Ethos Affect My Leadership?

By Andy Moss Ex Royal Signals and Former RSM at ASLS Pirbright

Have you ever spent time considering what is important to you? What defines who you are? Do you know what you stand for, what your key values are? Do you have a personal ethos? Following my departure from the Army earlier in the year I moved into a senior role within the UK's largest water company. Within a few months I found myself in a moral struggle. I started considering the things that are most important to me and considering the differences in 'company culture' between my new and former employers. I wrote down the things that define me, the way I behave and what I value the most. For the first time in my life I tried to define my own personal ethos. It was not easy. I found that I have not always upheld my current values. Experience and responsibility have shaped me, and this was contrary to my previous belief that all of your values are instilled in you from childhood and stay with you for life.

The British Army of 2020 is almost unrecognisable to the Army that I joined in 1995. Leadership training back then was log runs, stretcher races and a lot of shouting, none of which was underpinned by any doctrine or theory. Leadership was never discussed by soldiers and I don't think that I heard leadership theory discussed in any detail until my OC blew me away with a

leadership lecture to Officer Cadets at Glasgow UOTC. Unbelievably, by that point I was a WO2. On reflection it was fairly basic but to me at the time it was ground breaking stuff! I had a realisation that my 'influence' was absolutely key to my leadership. It triggered something in me that took me down an alternative path and brought new opportunities, completely changing the way I think and act. If that single moment affected my thoughts and actions, considering my personal ethos has helped me understand my potential, self-imposed limitations and how it may affect my leadership ability.

Ethos is the Greek word for character that is used to describe our guiding beliefs¹. On an individual level, our ethos is the principles and values that we hold dear. We all have a different ethos that has been created over a lifetime; developed from our individual experiences and the people or influences around us. Our ethos is shaped by the mentors and role models who will have guided us through different periods in our lives, who have inspired us and shaped our thoughts. There are several theories that study ethical leadership and most agree on 2 broad components: actions of leaders (conduct) and who they are as people (character) (Northouse, 2010). But these theories do not clearly differentiate as to whether actions are morally acceptable. Schumann (2001) suggested that leaders also have a moral obligation and responsibility to do the right thing. Behaviour and conduct are easy for those serving in the Army to comprehend. The culture is built upon a very clear set of Values & Standards that every member of the British Army is taught and continuously assessed against. What is much harder to comprehend are another set of theories that consider a leader's character; who leaders are as people, their perspective, virtues, beliefs. Their ethos. These theories are known as virtue-based leadership². Leaders often have a number of focuses to consider; the organisation, the task, the people and themselves. Rather than focusing on the organisation, the leader must first identify, then apply their own ethical code to its culture and ethics. Instead of focusing on the task, the leader must first evaluate and define the task on its virtues. Instead of focusing on the desires of the people, the leader must help set virtuous goals in their development and care. Perhaps most importantly, the leader must strive for virtue in his or her own life and must understand their own ethical principles. At its heart, ethical leadership is about being a good person, doing the right thing and being respectful to others. If influence is at the heart of leadership, it would

¹ Northouse, P (2010) Leadership. Theory and Practice, Fifth Edition,

² Bass, B.M., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behaviour. Leadership Quarterly, 10

suggest that the leader will have some form of impact on those being led, either positive or negative. This is an enormous responsibility and with it comes a huge ethical burden. An ethical leader considers positive and negative views, ensuring that decisions are made in an ethical manner whilst considering the needs and beliefs of everyone involved. The ethical actions of a leader enhance his or her credibility and integrity, which causes followers to trust. Leaders that exhibit positive values have the ability to powerfully influence the actions of others. Get it right and those under your leadership benefit greatly. Getting it wrong can have huge personal and reputational damage. I agree with WO1 Steve 'Spud' Armon when he wrote, "being a leader isn't about power, it's about responsibility"³.

Throughout my career I have stood up for what I believe to be right. My own moral compass has shaped my actions, the decisions that I have made and the advice I have given. At times this has been challenging. As a Corporal at ATR Bassingbourn I saw what bad looks like and had the moral courage to make a stand against unfair treatment and abuse of power. I have often debated what is right and wrong with my bosses but always respected their decision once I have given my viewpoint, often passionately; even if it didn't fully align with my beliefs. I do not envy Commanding Officers for the ethical leadership judgements that they are empowered to make, sometimes counter to their own beliefs, when considering administrative or disciplinary outcomes. At times my own righteousness has blinded me and as a result I have learned to discuss my views when it may impact on others. In recent years, where I have fallen short of my own values, and we all do at times, I have beaten myself up, reflected and ensured that I acted upon my failing. I have worked hard to be a more authentic leader by aligning my professional actions and words, to my personal thoughts and ethos.

Somehow, I have managed all this using my gut feeling. I have allowed my experiences and moral compass to guide me, without ever formally considering what my personal ethos is! Surely that can't be right and in recent months I have learned a great amount about myself by analysing my values, writing them down and formalising my ethos. I hope that I exhibit my values in my leadership style and in my actions; now I know what my values are, if I do not, I will endeavour to do so in the future. It is not easy, in fact it is very difficult. Writing what you want your values

³ www.thearmyleader/rsm-common-sense

to be is easy, analysing your authenticity is not. In order to formalise your ethos, honesty is critical. You must consider what you do, what you say, what you think and what you feel. It is also easy when analysing your behaviour to score yourself a 7 out of 10. 7 is safe and non-committal. 6, and you know you need to up your game and 8 means you are well on your way to excellence. Applying ethical leadership and understanding how our individual ethos affects our leadership, as well as working on being more authentic can only improve the self-awareness of our leaders. Some will get it wrong; unfortunately, it is a fact of human nature that knowledge does not change behaviour, experience does. I always offer the advice that if you are unsure of what to do, just do what you think to be the right thing!

My time within the UK's largest water company came to an end after just 6 months. The role was fantastic, challenging and varied. My peers were superb and have taught me more in 6 months than I learnt in my last 5 years in the Army. The managers and technicians who reported to me are the heroes that you take for granted and don't see (but you always have clean, safe drinking water). I had to take a very difficult decision to resign because in the most regulated industry in the world, performance and process come first and people, a distant second. The needs of the business take precedence over the needs of the staff which only impacts the lowest earners, the heroes, the 'troops on the ground'. My ethos and my values are not for sale nor up for debate and I will continue to do the right thing and be guided by my moral compass.

Questions:

- Do you know what you stand for? What are your fundamental values? Write them down.
- Write down three to five sentences that describe your personal standards or behaviour.
- Do you consistently conduct yourself according to your values and your personal standards or behaviour? Can you think of any instances where you have not?
- Think about role models you admire for their ethos. Which elements do you admire?
- Think about people who you do not admire for their ethos. What is wrong with their ethos?
- Are you authentic? Are what you say, do, feel and think are all the same?