The Green Book
on Senior Executive Leadership
(2014 Edition)

by Douglas R. Satterfield

The Great Suspension Bridge Between New York and Brooklyn

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Cover graphic is from the collection of drawings of the Brooklyn Bridge by John M. August Will in 1873. Original is in the Museum of the City of New York.

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a personal journey. What we make of it determines our ability to influence others and to lead. For there is no place for greatness in the world, it has to be created … created by leaders.

> *"Men make history and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better." — Harry Truman, U.S. President*

One year ago I published the first edition of *The Green Book on Senior Executive Leadership*. The feedback was positive and I want to thank everyone for their recommendations on how to make it better. This is not a complete work on leadership for it will never be finished.

In this edition of the "Green Book" I have attempted to clean up my punctuation and grammar and I have also corrected some typographical errors. Mrs. Morris, my 8th grade English teacher may finally be happy with my performance. The result is far from perfect but I have done my best.

To those who were part of my journey, who provided their wisdom … thank you.

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Brooklyn, NY: December 31, 2014

Characteristics of a Senior Executive Leader (1 to 42)

Senior leaders have a special place in our societies; and while they can make a big difference, with that comes huge responsibilities.

The purpose of this 2014 edition of the Green Book is to explore those special characteristics senior leaders share. In the 2013 Edition, we surveyed 42 of those fundamental traits. They can be found in that volume by visiting *theLeaderMaker.com* here (2013 Edition).

The need for great leaders has never been greater. As our world shrinks through technological advancements, the room for leadership errors gets smaller. I believe that through the study of the successes and failures of senior leaders, we each learn more about it. Being a leader is not easy. Social trends will come and go, but the need for leadership will never go away.

This 2014 edition of the Green Book differs from the earlier publication in the sophistication of senior leader attributes surveyed. We continue to dissect and review modern leaders and those from our past. We also continue our look at "Heroes" and the "Great Men and Women of History" since they add significantly to our understanding.

Here are what I consider to be the top ten themes here:

1. Senior leadership is discernible from other forms of leadership and there are distinctive characteristics that set them apart.
2. Leadership is learned and can be improved upon by applying common principles that have been used successfully throughout human history.
3. Humans are imperfect and have biases, preferences, and emotions. Knowing the psychology of people will help the leader utilize this knowledge to be better at leading.
4. You can learn about leadership by studying successes and failures of other leaders.
5. Leadership is hard work and requires intense academic study and practical, relevant experiences.
6. The character of a person supersedes race, gender, religion, origin of birth, etc. in determining how successful a leader can be.
7. Leaders need to have an honest and full assessment of their personal strengths and weaknesses. Only by doing so can they make improvements in leadership skills.
8. Great leadership doesn't require superior intelligence but it does require the ability to adapt quickly and produce effective action.
9. Leadership means rallying people to achieve a goal. Everything else is technique.
10. Leadership is proactive and future-oriented but a leader must prove their worth daily.

Let's begin this edition with Characteristic #43.

Characteristic #43: The Study of Great Leadership

All great leaders study leadership. They make it part of their routine to ensure that they understand and seek to improve their leadership skills and knowledge.

When the seasoned executive leader's mind is adequately mature and has obtained sufficient awareness to understand, only then does the leader have the true capacity of senior leadership. Otherwise, in the less experienced and less mature leader, the study of leadership will only involve the mechanical memorization of the elementary components of leadership.

This capacity is what separates the senior executive leader from other, less mature leaders. The commonplace leader, who has yet benefited from the study of history or from extensive experience, is unable to obtain the full advantage of leadership studies. Great leaders are then able to independently probe into greater detail, reflecting and reasoning on what they see and read. In short, their intellect and their hearts are occupied instead of merely their memory.

It is a measure of intellectual professionalism that they are able to acquire a taste for the truth of leadership rather than in the superficial. This will help to direct their reading and study into the proper channels in the future.

This is why it is imperative to have reliable intellectual resources to use, as in well-informed books and articles, professional blogs, and reliable academic classes that help to continually prepare the mind of that senior leader.

The senior leader must adapt their daily activities to provide for time to study and contemplation on the fundamentals of senior leadership. In time, the leader's mind develops wisdom and is then able to use the virtues of senior leadership in their conduct.

Failure to consciously study senior leadership and to develop the mind in those skills, is the mark of lesser maturity; a person who has yet to obtain the success of great leaders. These less mature leaders are those who use artificial traits for advancement and position. These can be the most dangerous, toxic, and least effective leaders.

The best of the best, those who achieve the highest levels of leadership, focus on the routinization of leadership study and the development of their leader mind. This is what separates the greatest leaders from those who remain.

Characteristic #44: Benevolence

There are a number of traits in senior leadership, but it is *benevolence* that is most closely associated with both a positive work environment and with improved productivity. A number of studies have shown that senior executive leaders are more likely to succeed by displaying benevolent qualities.

There are stories from history about the benevolent leader of a large Persian Empire two millennium ago. Despite conquering a number of other empires and defeating vast armies, Cyrus the Great was known to everyone as a force of good and a man of character: generous, courteous, and in possession of physical and moral courage.

All senior leaders possess some level of benevolence that contributes to their success. Senior leaders however are distinguished from all other leaders by the height of benevolence they are capable of showing.

Some of the abilities of a benevolent leader mean they:
- Attract and retain top talent.
- Motivate workers to exceptional levels of performance.
- Surround themselves with consistent top performers.
- Are perceived as being more caring, intelligent, and honest.
- Inspire loyalty from their followers.
- Are clear on expectations, objectives, and delegation of work.
- Better communicators.
- Give better routine feedback.
- Associated with superior long-term organizational success.

Social scientists have been studying different leadership styles for many decades and have found that several stand out as being most effective. These benevolent leadership traits are proven to be effective.

But the benevolent senior leader is not to be confused with weakness, acquiescence, or timidity. To the contrary, a truly benevolent leader must have the strength to be a skilled motivator, clear communicator, the moral courage, and mental toughness to achieve something great. This is no trait of the weak.

Just as Cyrus the Great was strong and was able to oversee a vast empire, he was also benevolent. The greatest of senior leaders are benevolent – strong and skilled.

Characteristic #45: Be All That You Can Be

The greatest of senior executive leaders improve themselves every day. Leadership at this level requires the commitment and the discipline to be the best you can be.

I'm a frequent flyer on a number of airlines. When flying, I get the chance to actually think about what I should be doing to get better and also observe other travelers. My observation is that a good number of my fellow travelers are simply biding their time away playing games on their laptops. Others however are reading the newspaper or a book. The newspaper and book are much more productive and requires more effort.

Senior leadership requires effort to do those things that improve our lot in life. This is not a 9 to 5 job. Wedging in a bit of reading, writing, or thinking into those normally wasted 15 minutes intervals has a large payoff later.

This commitment means also working hard to achieve a formal education and obtaining relevant certifications. Learning never stops. Those who make the deliberately decision to do more, get the greatest benefit later in life.

It also means learning more about people … the psychology of people. By being socially involved with others and then figuring out how we can do it better, means improving those needed people skills.

> *"A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best." — Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self-Reliance*

We know that senior leaders are observed and judged not as much on their technical skills and knowledge, as on their attitude and demeanor. Only through a personal decision to have the passion to improve is this possible.

Characteristic #46: Be Diplomatic
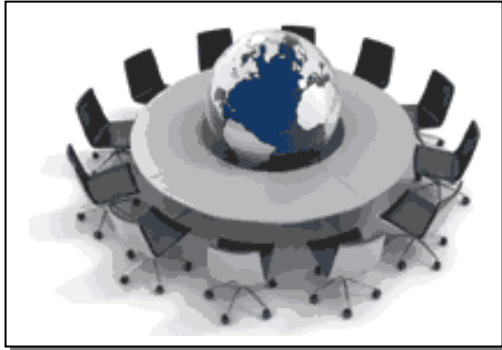
Senior leadership requires the special skills inherent in what is referred to as "diplomacy." This means that senior executive leaders have the ability to advance important ideas and to do so with tact and decorum.

For the purposes of this article, diplomacy is practiced at the organizational level. I'll leave statesmanship for another time. A successful senior leader, therefore, advances ideas by appealing to other senior leaders and downward to the lowest worker. They have the skills to engage anyone. The purpose is to gain advantage for their organization.

I often emphasize how senior leaders should be as comfortable talking (debating, negotiating) to the president of a large company as talking with one of their laborers – convincing anyone of them the value of an idea that should be advanced. When everyone is convinced of a great idea, success will naturally follow.

Diplomacy therefore requires the ability to be a leader of change without eliciting overly negative (or positive) emotions. This requires emotional strength, some sensitivity, and a good understanding of people. Exceptional people skills are necessary.

Here are some diplomatically required skills:

- *Decisiveness:* the ability to see and the authority to seize opportunities.
- *Wisdom:* knowledge of history and of cultures and how that might influence others.
- *Intelligence:* ability to quickly learn facts and ideas, to analyze, and assess risks.
- *Build Bridges:* manage conflict and establish alliances, friendships, and networks.
- *Politeness:* good manners and good listening, respect for others, direct engagement.
- *A Tough Skin:* reign in overt passions and be capable of receiving criticism without emotion and without feeling personally attacked.
- *Maintain Credibility and Deliver:* meet expectations, play by the rules (don't cheat), don't over promise, and always keep your promises.

While this is certainly not a complete list, it is a list of the most important for a senior leader who practices diplomacy. The difficulty is maintaining a professional persona of diplomacy when in conflict with strong personalities. This is what separates the good leader from the great.

Characteristic #47: Loyalty

Senior executive leaders possess the highest levels of loyalty to their organization and to those who work for them. Leadership requires loyalty but senior leadership demands an intensity of commitment not seen in other leaders.

It is difficult to imagine a great leader who is not intensely loyal to their organization and followers. We often say that a poor leader is one who lacks this trait. Furthermore, the senior leader is often the "cheerleader" of the organization; one who pushes for the organization's success at any opportunity.

"I can't expect loyalty from the army if I do not give it." – George C. Marshall

Loyalty[1] is a part of the social fabric that weaves people into a coherent team (organization, club, family, etc). John Kleinig notes that loyalty "is an essential ingredient in any civilized and humane system of morals."

Most of us would agree that loyalty is an important element, the glue that holds an organization together. We demand it and give it when earned. We consider it one of several key ingredients in leadership at all levels. Without it, our teams would not be as effective. Not unlike trust, loyalty to those we work and interact with is important for a host of good reasons.

This is why loyalty is such a critical trait in senior leaders. It is a part of the positive work environment … all leading to the same thing in a well functioning, efficient organization.

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[1] Interestingly, the concept of loyalty did not receive much attention until the 1960s and then only scant mention. It is now widely accepted that loyalty means faithfulness to a person, organization, country, or cause.

Characteristic #48: Poise

Poise is one of those senior leader characteristics rarely spoken about when discussing aspects of leadership. Yet, it is crucial for a leader to be dignified and self-confident in one's composure. Possessing poise distinguishes the good leader from the great leader.

Poise is a trait developed only through experience and real world testing. For leaders, poise is not only the display of a cool and stable temperament under pressure but also maintaining a command presence and politeness in manners simultaneously.

One of the lost traits in our society today is poise. Loss of poise among leaders also appears to be an unfortunate trend. Perhaps it is because declining respect in the workplace, but also I believe because of general intellectual laziness and a self-absorbed society. While there is little doubt about the trend, it is incumbent upon leaders to reverse it.

To learn to display poise, one must experience stress. These are the small things in life that can help. For instance, keeping your head and remaining pleasant when in a traffic jam, when treated rudely, frustrated by your friends, being reprimanded at work, etc. On the other hand, showing poise when important situations present themselves is also necessary. For example, one should demonstrate poise when losing a job or in an emergency. Difficult? Yes.

Earnest Hemingway described courage as "grace under pressure." We can say that "poise" is also grace under pressure … without too much offense to Mr. Hemingway.

The best and greatest senior leaders posses poise. Those people that are with a leader are more apt to follow when the leader demonstrates poise in all circumstances.

Characteristic #49: Maintaining the Human Touch
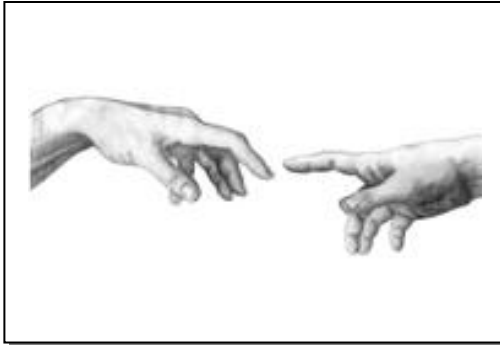
Leadership is about maintaining the human touch with people. People are the strength of their organization and leaders that do not understand this principle will always struggle to succeed. Effective leadership means treating people right and respecting them.

As the saying goes, "Take care of your people and they will take care of you." But it's more to it than just that.

In his well received book, *It's Not About the Coffee*, Howard Behar (former president of Starbucks International) says that "… at Starbucks, I've always said we're not in the coffee business serving people, we're in the people business servicing coffee."[1]

Until leaders understand that they must treat people well and take the time to interact with them, to help them when needed, to guide and to educate, then leaders will struggle. This means establishing a positive culture and good communication within the organization.

Behar's leadership philosophy is very simple; treat people well and you will succeed (in his case both the employee and the customer). What this means also is that you must know and understand your business. In Behar's case he had a fundamental understanding that the business was "not about the coffee" but about the people.

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[1] *It's Not About the Coffee: Lessons on Putting People First from a Life at Starbucks*, Howard Behar, The Penguin Group, New York, NY. 2007.

Characteristic #50: Credibility

Credibility

How Leaders *Gain* and *Lose* It
WHY PEOPLE DEMAND IT
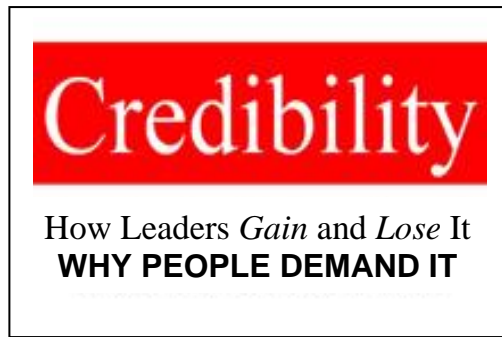
Senior leadership means having many attributes that are stronger and more powerful than other less experienced and motivated leaders. Having credibility is one of those complex characteristics that is hard to describe ... we know it when we see it.

Being able to articulate the components of credibility is important because it reaches back to the strength of basic leadership. There are many articles and books written on the subject. But while much is written, there is not much agreement on its components. So, what is "credibility?"

Credibility refers to how people perceive leaders and whether they trust them. Both tangible and intangible factors reveal why large organizations dedicate resources to accountability in managing leaders and developing leader credibility. "What ... makes for a leader that constituents would want to follow? The answer: *credibility*."[1]

It is, therefore, generally agreed that a senior leader possessing credibility has built a reputation of trust and confidence in others in their past. They are accountable for their actions and results of what they do today. Other components to credibility are:

- Motivation
- Integrity
- Competence
- Sound Judgment
- Good Communications
- Likeability

With the exception of "likeability," we have discussed these characteristics of leaders in the past. Likeability is really about maintaining the human touch. If you can "connect" with people, respect them, and treat them well, you will be likeable.

Credibility is positively correlated with success in every sphere of life. It is difficult to achieve and easily lost. Similar to reputation, a leader with credibility has something more for followers and that credibility offers a lifetime of successes when built and sustained.

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[1] *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*, James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, Jossey-Basse, San Francisco. 1993.

Characteristic #51: Maintaining Spiritual Health

Senior leadership is hard. One of the most challenging things for executive leaders to do is to keep a positive work culture. Fundamentally, organizational core values will play a key role in this work culture. When we consider a positive work culture and core values together, we call it "spiritual health."

This is rarely addressed and thus discussed here as a "must have" conversation for senior leaders.

"If you fail to maintain the spiritual health of the Corps, you will have failed as the ... commandant." – General Carl Epting Mundy, Jr., 30th U.S. Marine Commandant

What the past-commandant was saying is that the spiritual health of the organization must be kept by guarding against doing those things that would bring discredit or disgrace to the individual or to the organization. Thus, employees (in this case U.S. Marines) are expected to follow the organizations core values.

Leaders help keep the "spiritual health" of the organization. This is not necessarily religious spiritual health, although it could be.[1] Melding core values with a positive culture is difficult and must be driven from the highest levels of the organization. Failure to drive it and support the effort from senior executive leaders will eventually lead to decline.

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[1] Typically we find when spiritual health is discussed it means the individual. While this is absolutely true, especially for a leader. In contrast, the discussion here is on the spiritual health of an organization. I have found that there is little discussion anywhere on this topic; all is about personal spiritual health. Organizations have a culture driven by people. A work environment is established and can transform from bad to good, spiritual health being one of the keys to making it work properly.

Characteristic #52: Expressing Gratitude

Senior leadership means letting people know that you appreciate what they are doing. Gratitude can be expressed in many ways and I will address them here shortly, but most important is the daily effort to recognize as many people as reasonable.

The frequency of showing gratitude depends on opportunistic circumstances such as geographic location and social contact will allow. Large organizations with diverse teams scattered across the world require an additional effort through digital media or use of proxy. Proxies are those people who are close in stature (or rank) to the senior leader and bring the leader's most sincere gratitude wherever they go. Regardless, gratitude in some form should be practiced as often as possible, daily is best.

Additionally, leaders know that a figurative "pat on the back" is a great way to improve moral, instill motivation, and allows people to know that you see them doing the right thing. Gratitude is best expressed in person, of course, but can be done by sending a handwritten note or by telephone call. The more personal the gratitude, the more it will be valued.

One technique I use is calling individuals to my office or by pulling them aside as I walk about and saying that I noticed their recent work, saying it was well done, shake their hand, look them in the eye, smile, say thanks; this is very brief and very effective.

A general rule of thumb is to praise in public. I praise in public and private at about the same frequently. Nearly all my praises are planned so I get the specifics right. This shows I have made an effort to understand what they have done and truly know them. A planned effort to know about the person being praised is one way that senior leaders differ from others. Gratitude is not random but deliberate mechanism targeted to a specific person or group.

Personally delivered gratitude is a proven, effective way to show that you value people. The benefits to that person are enormous.

Characteristic #53: Being Ruthless when Necessary

When action is called for, when the company is in a death spiral, when the organization is headed to mission failure; it's time for the senior leadership to be ruthless and do those things necessary things to save it from destruction. Doing the right things morally, ethically, and legally is of course a must for all senior leaders.

Within these parameters there are actions that can be taken. Senior leaders must have the capability to be ruthless in execution when the time comes ... and yet show heart and compassion in other circumstances. This is particularly true of our senior military leaders.

There are some basic principles to guide us in the ruthlessness to bring an organization back from destruction:

1. Provide a new, innovative, and invigorating strategy. The strategy, the way to success, must be easy to communicate, simple in design, feasible, and achievable.
2. Being highly organized. Organizational leaders must ensure that the information necessary for success is present, relevant, and readily available in such a way that all leadership can use.
3. Obtaining a sense of urgency. Instill a culture of inspiration and motivation for all employees, in particular the leadership. Motivation is needed to transcend and survive the old approach that precipitated failure.
4. Ensure uncompromising execution. From the most senior leader downward in the organization, there must be a focused, coordinated, and aggressive implementation of the new strategy.

As often seen when our military first enters a combat zone, they often lack the ruthlessness necessary to be successful on the battlefield. This is, in part, due to the way we operate in peacetime. When the enemy bloodies us and those we know die in combat, we begin to focus our attention, get organized, and become more ruthless.

Senior leaders are obligated to provide the ruthlessness to overcome a failing organization. Otherwise we limp to failure and everything we will have done is simply wasted background noise.

One good read on the subject is: *The Rules of Ruthlessness: Getting Ahead in Business When Being Good Isn't Good Enough* by James DeRossitt

Characteristic #54: Understanding Relevant History
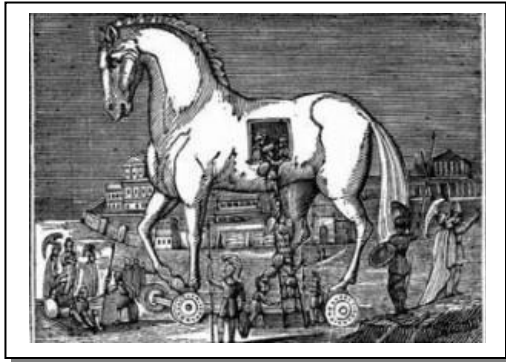
When General Petraeus, as the senior commander in Iraq, introduced his new "Clear, Hold, Build" strategy in late 2006, it was based on several factors; the most important of which was with an analysis and understanding of the *history of insurgencies*.

Not unlike a senior leader needing the relevant experience in order to be most successful, understanding the relevant history and ability to act on it is germane to the best senior leaders.

"That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons of history." – Aldous Huxley

The value of knowing the history of insurgencies – Indonesia, Columbia, and China – was instrumental in the development of General Petraeus' strategy. This strategy required an increase in troop strength to "clear" an area of insurgents and then to "hold" it long enough for the Iraqi government to "build" social and political institutions to address the grievances of the populace.

In this sense, knowing the history of that which is most pertinent to your organization is one of the keys to separating the good from the best leaders and those who are victorious from those who fail. Ultimately, knowing the history means that we recognize and can apply the lessons from the past where change was the common theme. Knowing the relevant history means having an appreciation of this change.

Senior leaders can gain much from their study of relevant history. A few are:

- Learning from others' mistakes and successes.
- Building a better way to think by reviewing the decision process of other leaders.
- Discovering how obstacles and problems were overcome.
- Knowing how social organizations were changed, leading to success or failure.
- Understanding of biases, information shortages, distortions, and defects in processes.
- Appreciating how systems and ways of thinking either worked or did not work.
- Knowing why leaders, groups, organizations, societies succeed or fail, stabilize or fall into chaos.

Understanding the relevant history therefore is not just about *knowing the facts* about what happened and when, but *why* and *under what circumstances* those things occurred. Without a good grasp of this, leaders will never be capable of understanding their organization or their circumstances.

What I personally look for in knowing history, is _what was the leader thinking_ at the time the decisions had to be made; not so much what the decision was, but _how the decision was decided_. It is the deliberate and thoughtful understanding of that thinking that helps us expand our own talents.

It is also incumbent upon the senior leader to teach, coach, and mentor other organizational leaders, workers, followers on the specifics of the relevant historical record that affects them and supports the strategy. The senior leader must take that relevant history and education and inform others so that they can implement the strategy.

General Petraeus' strategy led to what most of us know as the "Surge." The troops that carried it out with their bravery on the battlefield did more for the Iraqis than they will ever know.   The success of the "Surge" exceeded what many of us in combat thought possible at the time.

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One good read on the subject is: _Violent Politics: A History of Insurgency, Terrorism, and Guerilla War, from the American Revolution to Iraq_ by William R. Polk.

Characteristic #55: Accountability

Senior executive leaders know that accountability is something that is required of them and also know it is one of those traits that runs against our natural tendencies. Accepting responsibility for the actions of others, in particular poor actions of others, is a leader feature that sets them apart from others.

All leaders are accountable for those who work for them *within* their organization. Senior leaders take accountability to a higher level. Senior leader accountability also means being responsible for the impact of things that take place *outside* their organization.

> *"It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do for which we are accountable." – John-Baptiste Poquelin, stage name Molière*

Major unexpected outside events are difficult to predict but senior leaders must plan for them for added robustness in their organization. In the business world we have competitors, in the military there are armed enemies … all that think and act against our best interests. Senior leader accountability takes this into consideration when leading our organizations.

President Harry Truman had a sign on his Oval Office desk that read "The Buck Stops Here."[1] He understood that there were no excuses or justifications for failure and that it was unacceptable to pass responsibility to others. To him, failure was not an option. But if it did happen, he alone was to blame and he personally bore all the consequences.

This allows for a creating and sustaining a positive culture of work effort, performance, and operational excellence.

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[1] President Truman's sign has been on display in Missouri at the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum since 1957: http://www.trumanlibrary.org/buckstop.htm

Characteristic #56: Having Patience

Senior leadership means knowing when to act, when to speak, and when to make a decision. Because senior leaders are involved more at the strategic level of work (and thus less at the tactical level), it is not typically necessary to be quick to make a move.

Senior leadership in this respect is similar to the game of chess – patience is a virtue.

"Good character is not formed in a week or a month. It is created little by little, day by day. Protracted and patient effort is needed to develop good character." – Heraclitus of Ephesus

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus, as well as many others from ancient to modern times, wrote that to have patience is to be among those who possess the most admirable of human traits. From Shakespeare to the Bible, from St. Augustine to Leonardo de Vinci, philosophers to psychologists, whenever we hear of practical advice, *patience* is mentioned more often than nearly any other human characteristic. I would also venture to say that our grandmothers taught us the same lesson (grandmothers being exceptional people, of course).

Senior leaders know this to be true. All of us have learned through our many experiences (hard and often embarrassing lessons) that to make a hasty decision is frequently the wrong path to take. Often times, it is better to make no decision at all, see what develops, and wait for new information that may very well be beneficial.

Patience would seem to be an easy trait to conquer, but not so easy for those of us who are inclined to be aggressive in our legacy leadership positions. Senior leaders however must advance this skill, hone it, and use it wisely.

The acme of professional skills is the use of patience.

Characteristic #57: Ethical Behavior

Today is tax day. But I digress. I won't be sarcastic by referencing ethics and taxes in the same sentence (oh).

From many mentors throughout my military career I've been given counsel to, "Never do anything illegal, immoral, or *unethical.*" While it certainly provided me with successful and practical guidance, the *ethical* advice never seemed to jell in my mind.

Yet, in a profession such as the military, leadership demands ethical behavior. But, how do we clear up the lack of clarity in the concept of "ethics" as well as any ethical ambiguities?

I'm going to cut to the heart of the ethical issue quickly; as a realist. Here it is ... without the teaching, support, and insistence on ethical behavior, we have nothing but failure.

It is time for those of us in professional and senior leadership positions to discuss both our values and what is ethical – a moral evaluation about what is good and evil (values), what we ought to do and ought not do (prohibitions), as well as fairness. We have not done it ... at least we have not had enough conversations. By not having this dialogue, we make assumptions about and reinforce misperceptions on what is acceptable behavior.

No wonder people get themselves (and their organizations too) into trouble. Our boundaries of behavior are not always clear, nor rewards and punishments. This is only one part of the problem.

The other part of the problem, the "elephant in the room," is not discussed at all. The reason for a failure to have a good discussion in our society is because of pushback from prominent people who believe that ethics is *not* about good and evil, right and wrong. Ethics, they believe, is simply about cultural *approval* or *disapproval* of behavior. In other words, behavior is not "bad," it is just "not approved." This is the foundation of "political correctness" and will be left for another blog post.

Senior leaders must make it clear what the ethical standards are for the workplace, the beneficial reasons for following them, and insisting that they be followed. Otherwise, failure will inevitably follow.

Characteristic #58: Having Skin in the Game

During the Iraq war when parts of my military unit were in Fallujah (called the second battle of Fallujah) at its worst of times late in 2004, we were given tactical advice by the U.S. Marines. We were operating as engineers in their area and saw them on the frontlines daily and paid close attention to what they had to say ... they had, what we called, "skin in the game." They lived and died by their words and advice, so there was credibility in their advice.

Too often we listen to people giving opinions, making recommendations, telling us what we should do (and not), complaining, and giving advice to us. What they often do *not* have is "skin in the game." They have nothing to lose by being wrong. So, why should we listen to them? Well, I don't think we should listen to closely to anyone without "skin in the game."

"Skin in the game," is a term supposedly coined by Warren Buffett referring to a situation in which high-ranking insiders use their own money to buy stock in the company they are running. The idea behind creating this situation is to ensure that corporations are managed by like-minded individuals who share a stake in the company. Executives can talk all they want, but the best vote of confidence is putting one's own money on the line just like outside investors.

So, do we listen to those who only *talk the talk*, or do we listen to those who also *walk the walk*? The answer for senior executive leaders is obvious; we listen to those who are *vested* in a positive outcome that aligns with ours.

Senior leadership requires that we are vested in the outcome of our organizations, in mission success, and all its stakeholders. Without senior leaders with "skin in the game," we cannot truly trust them. Many of the financial failures in the last 20 years have involved fraud but also had an appreciable lack of skin in the game from its most senior leadership.

To this day, I still thank those US Marines for their advice and for helping us accomplish our mission and survive the fight.

Characteristic #59: The Optimism of Will in Others

It never seems to amaze me that some people can energize and harness an optimistic attitude in others. I admire those greatest of individuals and envy their endless ability to make others feel like someone special. Only the greatest of leaders can do this with groups of people, while simultaneously keeping their organization afloat.

This is true leadership. Recently, I wrote about "perpetual optimism" in individual leaders where I proposed that it is a learned attitude. Get back up when knocked down, smile when the world gets you down, "get 'er done," are just a few phrases that symbolize the individual leader who possesses the quality of optimism.

Yet, it is the great leader who is able to ignite optimism in others – a trait that separates the great from the good. When a senior leader is able to instill something in other people and then use that to the betterment of all, then that is truly something magical. These are the people not satisfied with who you are or what you are, but what you can be in your future. That is the acme of senior leadership in its most raw and endearing form.

> *"What one needs in life are the pessimism of intelligence and the optimism of will."*
> *– Ambassador André de Staercke*

Ambassador Staercke understood the "optimistic spirit of America." He understood that to be successful in the most important of positions of leadership, one had to know and control the spirit of optimism of others. Only by doing so could one be the most successful.

Therefore, the understanding of and harnessing of the *optimism of will in others* is a key characteristic of senior leaders that only the rarest possess.

Characteristic #60: Creating Partnerships

Senior executive leaders cultivate close professional partnerships and often succeed or fail based on their quality and power. Business leaders and other senior leaders in large organizations are more apt to formalize these relationships either contractually or in some agreement in principle. Regardless of formalization, senior leaders who create partnerships are more successful.

Partnerships serve a variety of functions. Leaders without them are prone to falling behind in their field or overtaken by surprise when unexpected events occur. Some of the functions of partnerships are:

- Provides a *network* of like-minded leaders who share ideas and techniques
- *Spreads risk* of failure and enhances organizational flexibility and adaptability
- Creates an *atmosphere of strength* in numbers and diversity of thought
- Allows for *better accountability* when properly used to review processes
- Provides a *enhanced communication* association for all employees
- Ensures *leaders are more effective, competent, and professional*
- Offers opportunity to be more successful in *critical transitions*

Effectively, the creation and sustainment of partnerships have little downside while providing significant advantage to the leader's organization. The leaders who do not develop potential partnerships are subjecting their organizations to greater risk.

Large organizations and their most senior leaders are those that are the most aggressive in creating and preserving partnerships of all associations. Often there is no monetary cost. Yet, there are expenses in terms of time consumed and expertise provided. This should never deter partnerships since the gains far outweigh possible risks.

One critical factor not to be overlooked is the *maintenance* of the partnerships. This takes extraordinary support and nurturing by the organization's most senior leaders. Without this senior leader involvement, more junior leaders and workers cannot be assured of the benefits from the relationships.

Senior leaders are different from other leaders in the level of importance and development of professional partnerships. The advantages of creating and properly maintaining partnerships is evident in the numbers we see in business and government sectors across the world.

Characteristic #61: Understanding Complex Situations
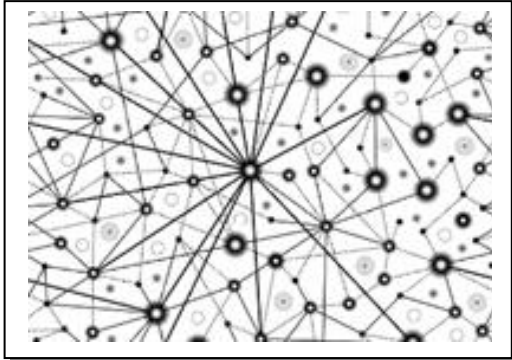
During the 1980s, the nuclear arms race between the United States and the USSR was frightening, complex, and potentially deadly for millions of people. The stakes were high, the issues multifaceted, and solutions hard to come by. Ultimately, U.S. and USSR leaders agreed to put some controls on nuclear weapon development. U.S. President Ronald Reagan agreed and eventually developed the concept of "trust but verify" to ensure that the USSR upheld its part of the bargain.

When working at the senior leader level, we often find ourselves involved in situations that are very complex and difficult to manage. The risks can be enormous; the lives of people, the failure of a large company, etc. The mark of a successful senior leader is to first *understand* the complex situation. To understand it is hard; to communicate it to others and offer solutions is harder.

I have personally seen many leaders, especially at the senior leader level, fail to know that they are in a state of affairs that demands their attention. Usually these situations are new and come as a surprise, stretching their personal leader capabilities so much that they have either simply overlooked the problem (very likely) or have chosen to ignore the problem. Leaders oftentimes do not have the relevant experience to recognize and act on the issue.

Leadership failure to understand complex situations is usually an outgrowth of leaders being unable to bring the issue within their mind, to think about it, to put into perspective, and to define the problem. This is why so much literature on complexity focuses on identification of the problem and why we are so often surprised by it.

In my experience there are many pertinent factors that go into understanding complex situations. Here are two important factors based on my personal experience:

1. Having an established, experienced senior leader team that works closely with the senior leader on other major organizational issues. They provide that relevant experience needed to begin the process of understanding the issue by putting it within the context of their organization.
2. The senior leader, him or herself, must be capable of visionary judgment. The leader must be able to look into the future and keep the organization on its mission.

Understanding complex situations also means being able to simplify it so that it can be communicated to others. President Reagan was able to do this with this "trust but verify" policy on nuclear weapons.

Characteristic #62: Recognizing Evil

In the 1980s, my friends and I had long conversations about Iraq's President Saddam Hussein and his role in the Iran-Iraq War. The debate about whether he was an evil dictator or a grandfatherly figure protecting his country raged off and on; even after he used chemical weapons to attack Kurdish civilians in 1988. Yet, the ability of a senior leader to recognize evil, articulate that to others, and then take action is truly a characteristic of the greatest of senior leaders.

When I ask people about what is "evil" in the world, I get many answers. Ultimately, the result is simple. No one can define it clearly. While they cannot tell me what evil is they know it when they see it. This is a popular view of evil and is an emotional based argument. Many argue that evil must be seen through the lens of reasoning, history, religion, and wisdom. A few people have even said that there is no such thing as evil. A fashionable modern view is that evil is only a religious judgment.

Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany is the most common contemporary example used to help define evil. Hitler was responsible for the planned and officially sanctioned extermination of approximately 6 million Jews and another 5 million "undesirables". This does not include the deaths resulting directly from the war itself.

Russia's Joseph Stalin is another illustration used less often because many in American still praise him and his socialist government. Estimates are very crude, but those killed directly by Stalin's purges and those that died of starvation and neglect is approximately 60 million.

Defining evil based on deaths attributable to a government or to a "strong man" is fraught with many serious problems. The most important, of course, is why someone didn't act to prevent it in the first place. Is allowing evil to flourish also evil? Some will say that evil is defined as the encouragement and conduct of activities that are illegal, immoral, and unethical. Evil is something that is bad for the country, they say.

Recognizing evil however is not an easy thing. Many of us simply disagree what is evil. This is why great senior leaders are able to "see" evil early enough to help us all recognize evil and see it early enough to act.

Characteristic #63: Employing Wisdom

When most of us think of those who employ wisdom, we typically think of "old people." Presumably this is because wisdom is the ability to make good judgments based on knowledge, experience, reasoning, and insight. Successful senior leaders are able to employ wisdom because they have the relevant experiences to discern good from bad.

The philosophical concept of *wisdom* is discussed as far back as recorded history. It is highly valued, being recognized in classical antiquity as one of the four cardinal virtues. Today, of course, it continues to be valued. Hitherto, the challenge is how to instill wisdom in people.[1]

There are many who have attempted to teach wisdom. Many self-help books and articles, college courses, and businesses we are told will infuse wisdom in us. Of course, none of this is true. The problem is we do not know how to develop wisdom in leaders, much less in any one person.

Not to be discouraged, there are things we can do to improve the chances that we can employ wisdom. Experience is the greatest teacher of lessons that one day helps us become wise. That is why the U.S. military has a policy of moving its personnel among many geographical assignments. We gain from those many experiences. That is also why continued formal education is required. Knowledge is an integral part of wisdom.

Yet, with all those things we attempt to do to achieve wisdom, there are some things that we simply do not understand about wisdom. Call it divine, magical, mystical, unknowing … regardless of the name, wisdom is about things we cannot always know. What we do know is that employing wisdom is the apex of senior leadership.

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[1] Sometimes wisdom is captured in cultural proverbs. All societies have attempted to find the key to wisdom. Proverbs gives us insight into the wisdom of our elders. There are literally thousands of these and between 300 and 500 in the Bible alone, for example, *"The more easily you get your wealth, the sooner you will lose it." – The Bible*

Characteristic #64: Decisiveness

In June of 1944 General Eisenhower made the final decision for the invasion of German-occupied France. This was the key event that led to the unraveling of Hitler's European empire. Eisenhower's order to go ashore in Normandy France has been called many things; but it cannot be said it was not decisive.

It is a common axiom that says, "leaders are decisive."

"It's better to be boldly decisive and risk being wrong than to agonize at length and be right too late." – Marilyn Moats Kennedy

Decisiveness is an essential component of great leaders. No one wants to work for a leader that cannot make decisions. No one wants to work for a leader that second-guesses himself and others. Indecisiveness is the character of a weak, fragile, ineffective leader. A decisive leader, on the other hand, gains credibility, gets the promotion, more responsibility, greater opportunities, and gains respect.

Whether a decision is necessarily quick and hasty or planned and deliberate, the leader must be ready at all times to act. This process means having as much relevant information as possible. In addition, the leader must have the aptitude to quickly weigh the pros and cons of that information within the context of a vision of the future.

The best leaders are those able to be decisive; they are prepared. For example, if a political leader is asked where they stand on an issue, then a clear answer must be given. If the politician is unprepared to answer, then they must say so. Trying to have it "both ways" to please everyone or to hide unpreparedness through double-talk is a sign of weak character and ineffectiveness.

We are told there is a crisis of leadership in American today. What is really being said is that there are indecisive leaders who occupy senior leader positions. Those leaders do more harm than good because they have not developed clarity and vision of the future. In a classic sense, they are not true leaders.

Characteristic #65: Thick-Skinned

A well-known characteristic of great senior leaders is a thick-skinned personality. This is only possible when the leader is one that possesses extensive, broadly-based, and relevant experiences. Yet, this does not necessarily mean the leader is arrogant or uncaring. In the best of leaders being thick-skinned means also being humble and optimistic.

Being thick-skinned means being able to personally deal with the failures, rejections, insults, and other stresses that comes with leading. All leaders can expect to face criticism on all decisions. This is particularly true of senior leaders. Senior leaders can anticipate the worst from the ill-informed, the immature, the resentful, and the power-hungry types. Today, these people are everywhere and are encouraged by the notoriety they get from attacking others.

Good examples of those who had to quickly develop a thick skin against criticism were Steve Jobs, Abraham Lincoln, and Colonel Sanders. These men had many failures and rejections, their decisions second guessed, and experienced name-calling on a grand scale. A recent example of a women who developed a thick skin was Sarah Palin. All of them overcame the numerous attacks on them and their families. They did so with grace. Those who inappropriately attacked them showed their lack of intellect and lack of professionalism.

> *"I have a thick skin, but I have a heart." – Dan Savage*

Leaders that develop a thick-skinned personality must never lose sight of the fact that there is a downside to it. Overcoming arrogance and a lack of caring should be on their list of things to avoid.

Characteristic #66: Ensuring Good Governance

In 2006, soon after the U.S. President announced a "surge" in Iraq, I was given an extra duty. Several of us, the most senior colonels, were to help "flush out the particulars of the military surge strategy." General Petraeus outlined the strategy for us but there was to be a structure to the direction and control of the offensive strategy. We were to *ensure good governance* of the coalition, as it carried out Petraeus' conduct of the war.

... and yet, I hated being on this "committee." I saw it as a distraction from my duties coordinating the engineer part of the surge effort. I did not know that senior leaders, to be successful, must take every effort to ensure good governance of their organizations. I did not know that senior leaders possess the ability to ensure good governance and that more junior leaders like me rarely get to see the inner workings of the processes that support it.

While the details of the inner workings are still classified, there are some principles of the governance framework that can be shared:

1. All coalition partners were to be treated as equals. They were to have their say in the command and control structure and have senior officers at the highest levels.
2. Non-military organizations were to be part of the war effort. This means that they were to participate and there were senior military leaders assigned to them to act as liaison officers to ensure this occurred.
3. Decision processes were to be transparent to coalition partners. These decisions were also to be relevant, quick, and effective.
4. A system to monitor the effectiveness of the strategy was to be established. There had to be some form of measurement, to include a baseline, to have some quantitative measure of success.
5. Lines of Effort were to be established to ensure priorities are resourced properly. This gave assurance that all activities supported the strategy.
6. Accountability for decisions was to be established at the appropriate level.

These principles are very similar to those in large successful businesses today. Without them, the organization can easily drift from its mission and expend resources incorrectly. The success of the "surge" speaks for itself. However, the internal governance of the coalition was not an easy one and did not, in itself, guarantee success.

I still did not like being on the committee to ensure good governance. Little did I know that it was preparing me for promotion to flag rank a short time later.

Characteristic #67: Professionally Unemotional

The most successful senior executive leaders are professionally unemotional, yet caring and respectful. Now, that may seem like an oxymoron and people will even disagree with me, but leaders must have a degree of detachment else they will be consumed by the daily affairs of those they lead. Likewise, they must *show* that they care about people.

Emotions can interfere with the job and the most senior leaders are careful to ensure this does not happen. This is related to having a thick-skin when it comes to criticism. Yet, it is more than simply being able to withstand disparagement. Being professionally unemotional also means being able to make decisions when there is immense pressure to act in some particular way and at a particular time that is not conducive to the organization.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that the professionally unemotional leader acts in a logical, well thought-out manner. Acting hastily or without having critically thought through a decision is one place where emotions can obstruct organizational tasks and mission.

When emotions come into play, it is not unusual for the "boss" to play favorites, to cater to certain personalities, overlook workplace infractions, etc. Doing what feels good when all is going well may set the conditions for problems later on in the workplace. When things are not going well or in a crisis, a leader who acts on their emotions, or the emotions of others, will make decisions that are not in the best interests of the organization or its mission.

In the long run, emotions work against a leader in the most senior positions. A professionally unemotional senior leader is better for the majority of the people who are part of the organization.

Characteristic #68: Being There in Person

One of the most profound and tragic lessons learned from World War I was that senior leaders *being there in person* was critical for winning a battle in combat. Whether the situation involves a large military action, a major business transition, or a national disaster, the senior leader must be physically present. Otherwise, opportunities are lost that cannot ever be regained.

Leaders are always busy people. Yet when the need arises, a leader that takes time to go to where the action is happening will help bring greater success. Whether planned or not, leaders must be there especially bring people together that would not normally occur and to create the dynamics of a holistic team effort. In the U.S. Army, we call this "one team, one fight."

Two examples to illustrate the point. First, an example of success occurred in New York City September 11, 2001 when Major Rudy Giuliani was "front and center" for all important events as the city recovered from the terrorist attacks. Second, an example of failure occurred in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina hit on August 29, 2005; President Bush did not show up to tour the city for newly two weeks. When the senior leader is not physically present at critical times, there is the perception that the leadership is detached, disconnected, and disengaged.

There are other factors that play into the perception that leaders are detached but it is physical presence that is the key to preventing misconceptions about engaged leadership. Senior leaders must take the time, change their schedules, and do those things that must be done in order to be there and to let people see and talk to them.

Characteristic #69: Virtue

The ancient Greeks considered "virtue" to be a positive trait that represented a morally good person. The trait was valued as the foundation of a moral being. As far as traits went, virtue was whatever was most valued.

Senior leaders must possess virtue; else they will not be a great leader. There is some disagreement with this argument but the differences are about the definition of a "great" leader, not on virtue as a human trait.

The four classic Cardinal virtues are: temperance, prudence, courage, and justice. All other virtues, some believe, cannot exist independently of these virtues. Christian theology mentions three virtues: faith, hope, and love. Regardless of the list, whether by a classic or contemporary philosopher, person of a religious faith, or a senior leader of in the business world, there is no disagreement that virtue is a trait that is for the good of that society and culture.

The greatest and most successful of leaders are those with identifiable virtues that reflect that culture and most valued by members of that society.

The way of the Japanese Samurai warrior, the Bushidō code, is typified by seven virtues: rectitude, courage, benevolence, respect, honesty, honor, and loyalty. All represent what a particular culture values most and thus becomes virtuous. These virtues are a moral principle upon which a society survives and thrives. Anything that results in the decline of any virtue is an enemy of that state.

Today, the concept of virtue is discounted as a religious characteristic based on "outdated" morality. This is a simplistic oversight that should be corrected. Anything that a society greatly valued can become a virtue.

Characteristic #70: Philanthropy

"Giving back." My grandmother told me many times that the trait that separated the most honorable people from the "average Joe" was giving to those in need. Her philosophy was a religious one and something she believed in deeply.

Senior leaders do more than give money to charitable organizations. The best of senior leaders dedicate a significant amount of their time, energy, and money to helping people. While this can be in many forms, their philanthropy should be remarkable; otherwise they are just another leader.

Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the 19th century that a key to American democracy was that they did not rely on others – government, an aristocracy, or the church – to solve their public problems. Americans, he noted, built "voluntary associations." They did it themselves, "private initiatives for the public good," which is to say, philanthropy. This was only a characteristic of a democratic society governed my great leaders.

It is noteworthy that a senior leader who gives, must do so out of their heart and not as an obligation. If the leader is giving only to be "seen" as a good leader, then the giving is not from the heart. A senior leader without the passion to do great things will never be great. In baseball we call it the "heart of the game." Without the internal burning desire to do something good for others, philanthropy will only mean going through the motions of being good.

> *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." – 2 Corinthians 9:7*

Senior leaders are philanthropic … and only by desire. There is no standard by which this can be measured. Likewise, there is nothing that should motivate the greatest leaders to give of their efforts for the good of others. Motivation must come from within.

My grandmother understood the difference and her wish was that she instilled this desire in her many grandchildren.

Characteristic #71: Political Competence

During the Korean War in 1951 U.S. President Harry Truman relieved General Douglas MacArthur of his command for making public statements that contradicted the administration's policies. MacArthur did not have a full appreciation of what he could and could not control and who were his allies ... he underestimated the President.

Despite having great military strategic and tactical knowledge, MacArthur made the mistake of letting his political competence lapse. Political competence, though rarely spoken about, is a critical characteristic of senior leaders.

The term "political" here is not used to just reference a political party: democrat or republican. The ability to make things happen depends upon more than having a great vision but also a strategy to achieve it. Much of the success of senior leaders is dependent on identifying allies and resistors, getting people to agree, building coalitions, and then having the ability to lead all of them.

"When you know what to do, then you can do what you know." – Anonymous

Political competence is the ability to know what can be controlled. It means knowing who will resist and who is needed to help the leader. Finding common ground, knowing the interests of others, and bringing people on board to the leader's ideas is crucial. A leader can have the best ideas and the most brilliant strategies, but will likely fail without political competence. It means that the leader has the knowledge to analyze the work environment and take the appropriate action.

General MacArthur had let his political competence plummet. Perhaps it was due to his age or the fact he was in a difficult and unpopular war far away from the shores of America. Regardless of the excuse, he did not exercise his political competence to the fullest and was fired from his job.

Characteristic #72: Recognizing the Important

In April 1918 near Paris, the German Army commander failed to recognize what the important contributions a small number of U.S. Marines entering the fight would have on the outcome. The Marines were inexperienced and had not proven themselves a significant battlefield force since their arrival a few months prior to the fight at Belleau Woods.

This would be the turning point in the war and the U.S. Marines helped turn the tide.

Like the German Army commander, senior leaders who fall short in recognizing the important – "seeing" what is happening around them that might affect their mission – will inevitably fail in their duty. Thus, a critical characteristic of a successful senior leader is that ability to see through the fog of day-to-day work and look at what is beyond it. Leaders do this in order to strategize about how to deal with those things that can have significant impact on their organization.

Important things could be a great opportunity or it could be a tremendous threat. Regardless of its potential impact, the first step in being prepared is simply recognizing it. Often leaders fail here. The reasons are many; the lack of good information or "intelligence" and lack of relevant leader experiences or training are some of the common reasons. By recognizing the important, the leader is able to create a relevant strategy and assemble the means to carry out the mission. The leader also can prioritize those things that must be done to take advantage of the opportunity or protect itself from the threat.

The signs are often there for everyone to see. When looking back on failed leaders, an analysis will frequently show the leader simply ignored important warnings. Even so, the lack of foresight by the senior leader is a not an excuse for failure. Leaders who are unable to see the important things should step down to let more capable leaders give it a try. Otherwise, the risk is high.

The German commander at Belleau Woods in 1918 was relieved of his duties for his failure to recognize the importance of the U.S. Marines. After the German failure of their offensive at Belleau Woods and their retreat, the Imperial German government was forced to surrender.

Characteristic #73: Build a Learning Culture

One of the many surprises that I encountered as a military flag officer was the number of senior civilians who were uneducated in their field. By uneducated I don't mean they lacked a formal college degree but they had stopped their education in any meaningful way. They must have figured that all they needed was to "punch their ticket" by earning an academic degree and that would make them successful.

The challenge for senior leaders, however, is to *build a learning culture* that carries throughout a person's career, and if lucky enough, throughout their lifetime.

Yes, there were civilians and military personnel who had obtained their education from a suspect college. I had the bad luck of working with a handful of civilians in the Department of Defense who were functionally illiterate but who had college degrees. This gets back to the lack of accountability in many organizations. More on this later. Yet, I had to ask myself, "Why were these people not furthering their education?" Why did they not take the opportunity to learn? In many organizations, the availability to learn is there, but the organization has no learning culture.

What the most successful senior leaders want is a workplace that drives innovation, that tries new things, and that encourages problem solving. To make this happen, as we see in the best of organizations, it is done in a workplace environment that embraces continuous learning. Of course, this discussion is not just about academic education. It's also about senior leaders creating a high-impact learning environment that gives employees the right mental tools and motivations.

There are a number of things senior leaders must do to ensure a learning environment:

1. Build trust and confidence in learning
2. Show the value of learning
3. Provide educational and special learning opportunities
4. Establish a process where what is learned can be shared
5. Empower employees to learn
6. Construct a formal learning system

This is an exciting area for senior leaders. The investment in their time and energy is small relative to the benefit. Senior leaders can lead learning through their personal actions, organizational policies, and through their encouraging efforts. In doing so, they will be encouraging a work environment that is enduring and thriving … and successful.

Characteristic #74: Controlled Obsession

My great aunt Marie was running her hairdresser shop across the street from the Little Rock Central High School on this day in 1957 when she was surprised by reporters from ABC and NBC. They had come to witness the standoff between the State of Arkansas and soldiers from the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division.

The battle of ideas to get legal racial segregation removed from U.S. law was an obsession of some of the best minds in American history. And a good thing that those leaders had controlled obsession, otherwise widespread violence may have occurred.

On May 17, 1957 the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that racial segregation in educational facilities was unconstitutional. It had been the goal of the great U.S. President Lincoln and many leaders before him and after to do exactly that. It took more than 90 years after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 to fully free non-whites from the legal sanctions to racial barriers.

To think that all this was easy or would have occurred due to the pure logic of it all is wishful thinking. There are certainly a number of senior leader traits that came into play but "obsession" is the one that mattered most. Without true leaders who were fixated on eliminating this injustice, we may have seen it continue.

My great aunt Marie also witnessed the temporary closing of that high school in 1958. Arkansas Governor Faubus fought the law by ordering all Little Rock high schools closed rather than permit racial integration. A federal court later struck down his school closing statute and in August 1959, Little Rock's high schools reopened and were integrated as required by law.

Knowing our history is important to learn lessons that work. An obsession can be good when directed for the betterment of all. That obsession must be controlled; else it becomes a psychological handicap or may cause someone to pursue an evil cause.

Characteristic #75: A Sense of Unpretentiousness

There is a new theme in the professional study of senior leaders and it says that those leaders must have a *sense of unpretentiousness* to be effective and successful. Anyone being familiar with U.S. leaders, and its military culture in particular, knows that such a character trait of their military certainly does not include the characteristic of unpretentiousness.

Given such a Western cultural bias, does the sense of unpretentiousness merit being a trait of senior leaders? My argument here will be that it is and, furthermore, it can be one of their most important traits.

U.S. General George S. Patton of World War II fame was the antithesis of unpretentiousness ... his bombastic traits are not unlike those of many political and military leaders across the globe and across recorded history. Another U.S. General, the current U.S. Chief of Staff and most senior General Martin E. Dempsey, I will argue has a tremendous sense of unpretentiousness. Both Patton and Dempsey share key qualities: decisiveness, intelligence, vision, and strength of character are some of their important ones. But Dempsey differs from Patton because he is not bombastic but prone to show humility instead.

Can it be that an effective and successful leader must be "impressive" or show that they are "important" to people? Clearly, the answer is no. Mahatma Gandhi for example, the leader of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India, is the epitome of the unpretentious leader and was enormously successful.

Western societies have changed in the past 75 years, along with their leaders. National politics and their citizen's social lives have changed most. They are richer, have greater leisure time, and enjoy more freedom than their ancestors. There are benefits. One is their leaders are more accommodating, better at creating a positive work environment, and are more approachable. These are the characteristics of a leader who is unpretentious.

Today, a sense of pretentiousness is a trait of senior leaders. It is not just acceptable, but necessary when leading people that have experienced the Western social-political changes. A General Patton would not survive as a leader in the current U.S. military. Decades from now, when we look back on those changes, only then will we be able to say whether having a greater sense of unpretentiousness was successful.

Characteristic #76: Seeing the World Clearly

In 1936, critics called Winston Churchill the "number one warmonger" in Britain for writing that the German Nazis were going to cause a war on a larger scale than ever before. Churchill had something that only the greatest of leaders possess. He had the ability of *seeing the world clearly*.

Such insight requires a talent to foretell the future, the ability to identify an existing problem with a realistic solution, and the aptitude to communicate that insight into easily understood terms. These are the most forward thinking senior leaders and they characteristically do not easily anger, they are patient and understand that great things are difficult and may take time.

The top story in the news this past couple of weeks has been the spread of the Ebola virus and the lives it has claimed in West Africa. Its spread to the United States and other nations outside Africa is causing panic in political circles. Ebola was no black swan event. It didn't appear one day and become a serious world threat the next. The virus has been known as a killer for decades; the deadliest form of the virus was discovered in 1976. "Why there wasn't a senior leader who was there alerting us to the potential spread?," is the consequential question of the day.

Senior leaders must be able to "see" the world as it is, not through the rose-colored glasses of an ideology or theory. Ideologies and theories help senior leaders frame events into a mental map. But those leaders who are able to use ideologies and theories for the tools that they are will be the most successful of leaders. Churchill understood this. When his country saw peace at any cost, he identified the danger and asked that Britain begin to prepare. Not unlike today when leaders ask that their countries prepare for impending danger, those leaders able to see the future will be frequently mocked and ignored.

World leadership missed the Ebola virus. What other foreseeable force is pushing the world into a dark place? Many tell us that Islamic extremism is another, as well as the misuse of nuclear fusion power-generation technology. Are there others? Certainly, there are and will be as long as humankind exists. When these waves of extremism and technology misuse passes, only then can we look back and say how successful were the senior leaders who gave us the warnings to be prepared.

Seeing the world clearly is a critical trait of senior leaders. It is a prerequisite trait of the greatest and most successful. Winston Churchill had a difficult time leading up to WWII but once it started and his country realized the gift he had, then was he able to offer the greatest of leadership.

Characteristic #77: Vigilance

Symbolic of the U.S. military's reserve components (the National Guard and Reserves) is the "Revolutionary Minuteman" who forever stands as a sentinel against this nation's enemies. Our military forces stand ready to protect the United States – ever present historically and dedicated to the future. This is what we can call *vigilance*; perpetually present at the helm and watchful of troubles.

Senior leaders themselves possess this trait of vigilance; the ability to remain on the lookout for problems and for opportunities. To be vigilant, a leader must have the traits of persistence, presence, and patience.

The struggle of any leader is to maintain one's ability to remain focused over the long term. Whether running an organization as the acting CEO or temporarily organizing a group of people for a short-term purpose, is far easier than remaining in place for the long haul. Many a leader has achieved notoriety for quickly coming into save a company from failure. But it's the leader who stays with the organization that is the real champion because it is those persons who really ensures things work.

It is indeed difficult to remain vigilant. That is why this is a trait of senior leaders. More junior leaders are not as likely to understand its precise value. Also junior leaders are less likely to remain in any particular position long. But the senior leader, who has the task to see the future and possesses the vision, is the one who must keep his eye on that future to guide and mentor those who follow.

> *"The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." – Wendell Phillips*

Senior leaders recognize both the value of vigilance and also its difficulty. It is human nature to let one's guard down, to lay back and relax. To Americans we recall our history when General George Washington led a small band of Minutemen across the Delaware River to attack the enemy on Christmas night 1776. Washington's forces attacked the Hessian troops, surprising them and quickly overwhelming their inadequate defenses. The surprise maneuver and the small victory gave the American colonies a much needed boost in morale.

Vigilance is a senior leader trait. Failure to maintain it can mean the difference between success in business and bankruptcy ... or winning a battle as George Washington did on that night over 200 years ago.

Characteristic #78: Calm Acceptance of the Real World

Attending the U.S. Army Infantry School as second lieutenants, we were introduced to the M113 Armored Personnel Carrier. Despite its introduction into Vietnam 20 years earlier with tactical success, it was still plagued with a few problems – notably a weak engine, difficult maintenance, and limited weapon systems. Many of us complained about the weaknesses but our TAC Sergeant told us it had "saved my ass in Nam." End of complaints.

The best senior leaders recognize that the real world is imperfect and have learned to accept it for what it is. There are a few important things in life a good leader can influence. It is expected that action should be taken when a leader can make a difference. This is a professional imperative.

Leaders understand the reality of their organization; the people, their mission, equipment, and training. They understand that occasionally things fail, there are deficiencies in the way things are done, and that great care is often needed to keep it going. Great leaders know what they can and should do and concentrate their efforts there. All human-designed systems and procedures are imperfect and require continuous human intervention to keep things on track.

All the more reason that successful leaders make a conscious decision to identify items that are essential for the organization and work hard to affect positive change. Many believe this to be the epitome of a great leader. So important is the concept that careers are made on communicating the best way to do it and we call these "business management practices."

Calmly accepting the real word for what it is can be beneficial. All of us have known people who spend their time and money trying to change something that cannot be changed. Leaders should work to avoid such a trap. Leaders should thus concentrate their efforts on the important and accept the real world for what it is. This does not mean we should not tackle the most difficult problems or attempt to make right a wrong even when it seems impossible.

Today, the M113 Armored Personnel Carrier is being replaced by the M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle – more powerful, easier to maintain, and with greater firepower. The M113 deficiencies were identified well before my Infantry class went through its training and a new design for an improved Infantry vehicle was approved and built.

Characteristic #79: To Create Unity

Over the past few months, we have witnessed leaders of several countries who failed decisively to unite their nation. Socialist leaders generally do a better job although they typically use brute force to achieve that end. Democratic nations frequently have a more difficult environment to achieve that desired outcome. Regardless of the country or organization, creating unity is a universally recognized trait of great senior leadership.

Today very few nations have any serious threat to the existence of statehood. Most of the Americas and European nations are good examples. Yet their citizenry lack unity and is reflected in their many economic, social, and political problems. Disunity appears to be the norm for a democratic nation. While much of this is inherent in their makeup, and while it can be a good thing, disunity is costly.

What are the necessary ingredients senior leaders must exercise to create unity?

   1. *Exercise of Good Judgment.* Most difficult and requiring relevant experience to learn is the ability to recognize the best way to do things that will bring people together. Many leaders fail here; in particular when all their choices appear to them as bad.

   2. *Great People Skills.* Understanding human psychology, exercising respect for others, great communications, and possessing the ability to "connect" to people are a necessary start. People they lead need to feel that their leaders understand their circumstances and are on their side.

Are these the only two ingredients? Well, no. There are many more … but these are the two that, if absent, unity cannot exist. Without both, the right decisions will not be made and people will not be convinced the right decision is being made.

Great leaders, those leaders who are known for uniting people, are careful to use good judgment and their people skills to communicate the importance of that judgment. Often, the judgment is poorly communicated; making unity difficult and uneven. This is a common theme of democracy and is both good for its development and angst for its people.

There is strength in unity. Interestingly, democracies remain the light to which most still aspire.

Characteristic #80: Breaking Stupid Rules

Christopher is a team leader with a well-known oil extraction firm in downtown Houston. But he had a problem retarding his ability to produce high quality designs. His company would not allow him the required computer software – he succeeded anyway. Breaking stupid rules is sometimes necessary to get things done.

The firm had a policy that all design software costing over $500 be evaluated by a management group at the corporate office; they rejected his request. Spending $5,000 of his own money on the proprietary software, Christopher was able to produce the designs, saving the company $4 million in less than two years.

The privilege of senior leadership comes with an unwritten responsibility to cut through rules that act as barriers to mission accomplishment. I would argue that the reason we have leaders with relevant experience is that they can do exactly that ... legally of course, when the rules tell us otherwise. Others call this cutting *red tape*.

If we look into the depths of any successful organization we will find more Christophers who are working to overcoming the rules, regulations, and policies that unintentionally hinder the mission. This is not a new concept. A book by Bill Jensen and Josh Klein[1] focuses on this very idea. They write that leaders who have authority can really make a difference.

> *"Change is ... driven by managers who have a platform to advocate for a new direction and the ability to hire, promote, and reward those who embrace it."* – *Jack Welch, former CEO, General Electric*

Leaders need to acknowledge that only those with the power to drive change are those that can hire, promote, and reward those who follow their lead in overcoming mission barriers – like stupid rules. Senior leaders who do this will be successful. Those who don't will put their organizations at risk to a future that is hobbled with unnecessary bureaucracy.

Christopher was eventually reimbursed his money but later moved on to create his own firm. Now in Dallas, Texas he is even more successful and is fulfilling the American dream.

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[1] *Hacking Work: Breaking Stupid Rules for Smart Results* by Bill Jensen and Josh Klein, 2010.

Characteristic #81: Being Inspirational

The world's greatest senior leaders have one thing in common. Each has been able to rally people to a great cause and lead them to achieve something that no one else was able to do. In one word, these leaders were *inspirational*.

Due to the recognition of the value of inspirational leadership, it has been studied thoroughly. Yet there is no agreement among the most intelligent minds as to the basic requirements of those who inspire. Many books have been written and some make a living teaching others how to be an inspirational, but the content of each differs. Is the formula for inspirational leadership impossible to find – does it even exist?

> *"And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country." – John F. Kennedy*

President Kennedy in his inauguration speech, given in 1961, challenged the people of America to put the betterment of all citizens ahead of personal ambition and created a vision that we can improve our country by each person doing his part. His speech was a rallying cry to pull together as one, created hope in all of humankind, defended the quest for freedom for all, and it could be achieved through belief, strength, and sacrifice.

The greatest leaders inspire people to achieve great things. They do this by providing a simple and logical future to seek and enhancing the lives of all those they encounter. Charismatic leadership is not a necessary part of those who inspire others; it also can be done in a quiet, respectful way. And, it doesn't have to be the most popular thing to do. What is important is to inspire others by rallying people to a greater good.

Here are some of the most important things that inspirational leaders do:

1. Provide a bold vision
2. Make people's lives meaningful
3. Involve everyone; empower and trust all
4. Motivate, inspire, and energize

Leaders who are inspirational also have the talent to consistently make great decisions, especially when in a complex and uncertain environment. Great leaders can mould their vision into a clear and simple strategy. Only then can people be rallied to it.

Characteristic #82: Getting Results

Historically, the most important factor of senior leadership is getting results. This is why, today at least, it is vital to have a senior leader who has a good moral foundation and can thus be trusted to do the right thing. Furthermore, the best senior leaders never believe the end justifies the means to achieve a goal. That is simply unacceptable.

To leaders, the *means* (processes and methods) we use to reach our *ends* (missions and goals), are just as important as the *ways* (resources available) to get there. This is why, in my opinion, Socialism is such a failure. Socialism fails because the dream of a utopian society (the ends) has historically been achieved through the barrel of a gun and the gulag (the means and ways). When millions die because of the Socialist ideology, which occurred in the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and elsewhere in the 20th Century, it tells us much about the means to achieving a goal. The means and ways, therefore, are pretty darn important.

Some people will tell us that the "intent" of the leader is important. Frankly, results matter more. In Western societies we've been tilting toward the "intent" of a leader by which to judge them. However this runs counter to the idea of a good leader. True, a leader must first believe in the cause, but then the leader must actually achieve the goal of that cause.

Furthermore, there are no excuses for failure. If a leader is senior enough in the organization, it is expected that they are able foresee all possible barriers to success and have taken appropriate action. A senior leader telling us something could not be done, that they previously signed up to do, is also contemptible. In the military we are fond of saying, "the maximum effective range of an excuse is zero meters."

Getting results also means getting those results even when the leader has no authority and must rely upon other subjective skills, such as persuasion. Persuasion and other social skills are essential. It is indeed rare that the senior leader will possess all the resources and permissions needed to get things done. That is why developing relationships, creating trust and confidence in others, and influencing people to achieve greater things is so important.
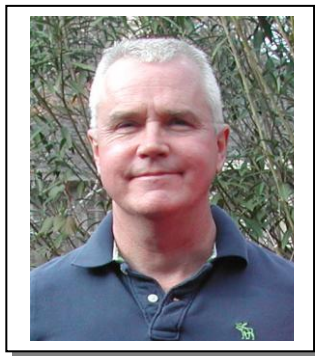
Senior leaders get things done. They do it ethically and by taking care of people. They aspire loyalty though tough times and good. They have, what we call, gravitas!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Douglas Satterfield and I live with my wife Nancy in New York City. My experience in Senior Executive Leadership has been fascinating and my intent is to share some of the lessons and characteristics of those who have gone before me.

As I travel about, people ask me to discuss leadership and those many conversations have helped develop deeper friendships. These "Green Books" capture both those discussions and new leadership discoveries.