



Andy Blanchard

The Call To Leadership

Duty, Honor and Country set the tone.

I am constantly asked what it takes to be a leader. I am quick to clarify to the questioner, “You mean an effective leader!” One needs only to read *The Wall Street Journal* or watch the evening news to realize that the business community is filled with individuals who have been placed in positions of leadership, but are not effective leaders. We are continually barraged with examples of senior managers who got it wrong, who acted as if the organization existed to serve their personal needs and ego. Unfortunately, this usually results in peril for the “leader” as well as the employees.

My personal belief is that one is called to be a leader, not unlike a person called to the ministry. Being a leader is not for the faint of heart. Grave responsibility and trust is bestowed upon the leader. No single individual has more influence on setting the tone for an organization, be it civic, corporate or military.

For decades, people have studied what makes an effective leader. Research suggests that an individual should possess numerous leadership traits. Research also reports that the only common attribute among all leaders is a great skill at communicating via both the written and spoken language.

My personal definition of the components of leadership includes integrity, judgment, courage, decisiveness, loyalty, initiative, tact, justice, enthusiasm, bearing, endurance and unselfishness. I would encourage anyone who “has the calling” to lead to become a student of leadership. Such a student today has ample sources to read and study to perfect the art of leadership and discern what is really required of today’s leaders.

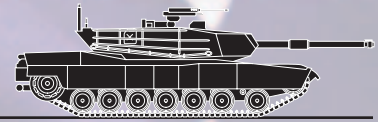
REQUIREMENTS OF LEADERSHIP

Exactly what is required of leaders in this day and age? Seven key components come to mind:

1. A leader must be able to establish a vision for the organization, not just who we are and where we want to go but, more importantly, what the organization can be.

2. A leader must hold himself or herself and the organization accountable. People depend on you, whether they are customers, stakeholders or shareholders who have placed their trust in you.
3. Relentless drive is very important. The leader must have the internal fortitude to see that the organization achieves its goals.
4. A leader must possess excellent decision-making skills. The higher an individual progresses up the leadership ladder, the harder the decisions become. The required data can be difficult to obtain, and the risk associated with the decision becomes greater. A senior leader rarely is afforded the opportunity to make an “easy” decision. Every decision carries the risk of negative consequences and costs, and plans must be put in place to mitigate these risks.
5. A leader must be competent in the skills required to manage the organization, including financial, decision making, project planning, governance skills, etc. The leader must understand the industry as well as the marketplace, including customers and competitors. In this case, one would become proficient in conducting a SWOT analysis and using Michael Porter’s Five Forces of Competitive Position model.
6. A leader is placed under constant stress by the demands of the job and must learn early in the game how to take proper care of himself in terms of spiritual, mental and physical health. A leader who buckles under the daily pressures of the job or reaches “burnout” is useless to the organization and by no means can lead effectively.
7. A leader must learn to listen to the voice of the customer and to his employees. As a rule of thumb, the effective leader should be listening twice as much as he is pontificating. It is through listening that one is able to understand and synthesize how the organization is performing and what actions are required.

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DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY

One can take many paths to become an effective leader. I had the fortunate opportunity to begin my studies in leadership at the United States Military Academy at West Point. This institution has a reputation for developing outstanding leaders who have admirably served our country as presidents, generals and captains of industry.

As a Plebe (the affectionate name for a freshman) at West Point, I learned the very basis of leadership – the art of following. The cornerstone principle is that you must learn to effectively follow before you can effectively lead. So for an entire year, a Plebe practices following and taking orders. Many times as a young Plebe, I thought that my orders did not make



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Active Duty Military Personnel by Rank/Grade
Department of Defense, March 31, 2006

ARMY		NAVY	
General	11	Admiral	9
Lt General	49	Vice Admiral	30
Maj General	97	Rear Admiral (U)	70
Brig General	156	Rear Admiral (L)	106
Colonel	3,857	Captain	3,250
Lieutenant Col	9,178	Commander	6,831
Major	14,182	Lt Commander	10,341
Captain	25,178	Lieutenant	17,509
1 st Lieutenant	8,866	Lieutenant (JG)	6,336
2 nd Lieutenant	6,305	Ensign	5,895
Chief Warrant Officer W-5	425	Chief Warrant Officer W-5	47
Chief Warrant Officer W-4	1,648	Chief Warrant Officer W-4	283
Chief Warrant Officer W-3	3,350	Chief Warrant Officer W-3	665
Chief Warrant Officer W-2	4,823	Chief Warrant Officer W-2	599
Warrant Officer W-1	2,401		
Total Officer	80,526	Total Officer	51,971
Total Enlisted	408,724	Total Enlisted	299,166
Total Cadets	4,068	Total Midshipmen	4,327

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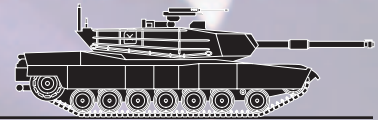
The DoD lists Active Duty Personnel by Rank/Grade across all services. Read it in **Welding & Gases Today Online**.

sense, but over time I learned that understanding depends on your perspective.

In my early youth, I learned to get beyond myself and strive to reach a broader perspective. I learned to trust that my supervisor had a broader perspective, the ability to see a broader vision facing the organization, and that if I signed up to do my part, the entire team will accomplish its mission on the battlefield. I learned as a Plebe that better results can be achieved by working as a team. A popular saying at the Academy is “Cooperate and Graduate.” West Point is ranked fourth in the nation for engineering schools, and believe me, I learned quickly to “cooperate” so that I could accomplish the mission of graduating.

As a Second Lieutenant in the Army, I was given great responsibility, in truth more than I thought I could handle, but the Army likes to “pile it on” in a supportive environment so that a young lieutenant quickly climbs the learning curve. The vision of the U.S. Army is to defend our country in time of war. A young officer has no time to lose in becoming proficient in executing responsibility. A Second Lieutenant is given responsibility for a pla-

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toon of soldiers and mission-essential equipment, typically highly technical in nature and very expensive, with costs



Cadet Captain Andy Blanchard, Senior, West Point Academy, 1981

ranging in the millions of dollars. An effective lieutenant quickly learns that he must serve his troops and look after their well being, rather than demand that the troops treat him as royalty. The leader must earn the respect of his organization. The officer who “demands” the respect of his troops and conducts himself in a tyrannical manner is destined to fail. Believe me when I say that many leaders never learn this fundamental lesson. For example, an officer always moves to the back of the chow line because he wants to ensure that his troops are properly fed before he allows himself to eat. The effective leader is driven to the core to serve the organization rather than be served, thus earning the respect necessary to lead.

This article originally appeared in the Third Quarter, Summer 2006 issue of *Welding & Gases Today* ©Data Key Communications, Inc. All rights reserved.

As a Captain and company commander, I had the opportunity to learn the skills required to pull together people, resources and mission. A successful mission doesn't just happen. A detailed assessment of the situation and the organization's capabilities, coupled with a detailed plan, are required to succeed. A leader must be able to bring all his military training into play as he works with the company's leadership team to develop a detailed “operations order” to successfully accomplish the mission without endangering the lives of the soldiers. As a company commander, I learned that my unit is part of a larger organization's mission. I learned that my higher commander and my contemporaries have placed their trust in me, and that I must not fail. An important lesson that an effective leader internalizes is that failure is not an option. Were I to fail, not only would I jeopardize the greater organization's mission (and possibly hundreds of lives), but I would disgrace myself.

CORE VALUES

At West Point, heritage and pride run very deep. General Douglas MacArthur, a graduate of West Point, said it best in describing what is expected of great leaders during his last address to the Corps of Cadets: “Duty — Honor — Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be...”

Leadership is a calling and those accepting the call must prepare for a career of service to their fellow man and to their organization. It is a career path that requires constant learning and a sincere devotion to listening to the “troops.” A leader's job is never done; a time clock or a standard work day has no relevance. The effective leader today is a 24/7 servant, constantly on watch to protect his people and provide them with the necessary resources to effectively

accomplish the mission.

The Army taught me that duty, honor and country are essential. It is a lesson that transposes across my life each day in my encounters with family, friends, employees and customers.

After graduating from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1981, Andy Blanchard served 5½ years with the 5th Infantry Division at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and the 3rd Infantry Division in Germany. He spent another five years in the U.S. Army Reserve, based in South Carolina. Today Blanchard serves as president & CEO - North America of ESAB Welding & Cutting Products and can be reached at ablanchard@esab.com or 717-630-3304. 