Celebrating 25 Years of Leadership
If you haven’t noticed, millennials (individuals born from 1980 to 2000) are in your organization, and their numbers are growing. According to the recent report by Barnes & Noble College, “The College Student Mindset for Career Preparation & Success,” millennials will be 50 percent of the U.S. workforce by 2020, and 75 percent of the global workforce by 2025.

The study reports that 90 percent of this cohort considers communication skills as “most important” to their career. When I read this, I had to smile, because, as Peter Drucker taught us, “Communication is not saying something; communication is being heard.”

It brings to mind another “Drucker-ism” that I have experienced in my engagement of millennials: “Ask, don’t tell.” When we ask millennials, “What would you think if we did this?,” more than telling them, “Now hear this!,” they’re eager to engage because we are speaking their language. I love how articulate and focused millennials are: they talk about what they believe, and then they do something about it.

They have a very positive view of the future and of contributing to the future. Millennial thought processes seem not to be bound by the constraints of the past. Millennials open new doors, leading the way to new understanding and new engagement, and they invite those “beyond the walls of the organization” to the table. Among other major findings, Pew Research has found millennials to be a complex and introspective generation, with a far larger number of non-Caucasians than its predecessors, as well as a greater number raised...
by a single parent. Millennials are asking the right questions. In their own 2014 study for the Brookings Institution, Morley Winograd and Dr. Michael Hais project a future, led by millennials, in which Americans “will demonstrate a greater desire to advance the welfare of the group and be less concerned with individual success.” This world, the Brookings study asserts, will be “radically different than the one those who wield power today have grown accustomed to leading.”

At the Hesselbein Institute, we believe that when “they”—the people we want to bring into our organization—look at us, they must be able to find themselves. If the answer is “Yes,” we are part of the future. If the answer is “No, but we’re thinking about it...” we have already missed many opportunities. We so strongly believe in the quality and character of the millennial generation that recently we invited millennial leaders to contribute to our latest book: *Peter Drucker’s Five Most Important Questions: Enduring Wisdom for Today’s Leaders*. Caroline Ghosn, cofounder of Levo League, an organization whose mission is to empower young women in the first ten years of their careers, shares her insight on the importance of articulating a vision. Michael Radparvar shares the story about the origins of the popular Holstee manifesto and how this manifesto transformed into his company’s own mission statement. Already, the book is part of the required reading curriculum at the Yale School of Management. You can find more information about the book on our website, www.HesselbeinInstitute.org.

**New Beginnings**

On Thursday, January 29, we warmly welcomed the University of Pittsburgh’s new Chancellor, Patrick Gallagher, to our Hesselbein Institute offices at 320 Park Avenue in the thirty-fourth-floor boardroom of Mutual of America Life Insurance Company. The newly appointed senior vice chancellor for engagement and chief of staff, Dr. Kathy Humphrey, joined Chancellor Gallagher. For those of you who are not aware, the University of Pittsburgh holds a very special place in my heart. Long ago, in the mountains of western Pennsylvania, there was a seventeen-year-old girl, Frances, who was hungry for learning. My family scraped up, somehow, $235, the tuition for one semester at the University of Pittsburgh Junior College. For me, it was indeed a “cathedral of learning.” Seven weeks later, my father died. Although I finished the semester, I could not go back to school full time. I got a job to take care of my mother, little brother, and sister, and I went to classes at night and on Saturdays. Even though I did not receive a college degree for all of those courses, over the years, I received twenty-three honorary doctoral degrees. So my journey—lifelong learning, civic engagement, and “To Serve Is to Live”—began long ago, at my beloved Jr. Pitt, and continues to this day. In 2009, the university named a great Global Academy in my name, and to date, the Hesselbein Global Academy for Student Leadership and Civic Engagement has welcomed and trained 350 student scholars representing more than fifty countries, including Ghana, Greece, Kosovo, Morocco, Nepal, the Philippines, Romania, and Singapore, to name just a few.

In 2012, I formally donated my life’s work to the University of Pittsburgh, whose Library Resource staff is led by School of Information Sciences (iSchool) graduate student Kathleen Donaho. Kathleen was employed as an undergraduate history major and continues to process the collection. Following our meeting with the Chancellor, we opened the doors and invited a group of a dozen University of Pittsburgh alumni living and working in New York to meet the Chancellor and join in a roundtable discussion. “Ask, don’t tell,” echoed throughout the halls.

*Frances Hesselbein is editor-in-chief of Leader to Leader, founding president of the Drucker Foundation, president and CEO of The Frances Hesselbein Leadership Institute, and former chief executive officer of the Girl Scouts of the USA.*
21 SUCCESS SUTRAS FOR CEOs

by M. S. Rao

Your first and foremost job as a leader is to take charge of your own energy and then help to orchestrate the energy of those around you.

— Peter F. Drucker

In everyone’s life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.

— Albert Schweitzer

Iconic leaders such as Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric; Carlos Ghosn, the CEO of Renault-Nissan; the late Steve Jobs, the cofounder and CEO of Apple; and Lakshmi Niwas Mittal, the chairman and CEO of ArcelorMittal, all encountered leadership challenges in the turbulent business world. Yet they succeeded as CEOs and left a path for other leaders to follow. This article describes twenty-one success sutras (principles) that CEOs can use to overcome leadership challenges and to keep their organizations great globally.

1. Communicate Clearly

CEOs must articulate their vision effectively. Some CEOs start with the assumption that other people think the same way they do. The higher up the ladder you are, the more likely you must reach out to people who don’t understand what you are doing or why you are doing it. Hence, there is an urgent need for CEOs to share their important information with all stakeholders to avoid ambiguity and to inspire others to accomplish their vision. Steve Jobs is an ideal example of a leader who communicated his vision clearly
4. Keep People Before Profit

Herb Kelleher, the cofounder and former CEO of Southwest Airlines, valued employees as people, not as workers. He emphasized human resources (HR) to keep his company profitable for thirty consecutive years. In the airline industry, the competition is cut-throat; companies struggle to keep their profitability continuously for five years, but Kelleher demonstrated his leadership abilities and won accolades internationally. He proved his critics wrong and gave sleepless nights to his competitors, and finally made Southwest an inspiring story in the corporate world in America. The company has become a role model for other companies because of its ability to sustain profitability by keeping people before profit.

5. Be Adaptable

The dean of leadership studies, the late Warren Bennis remarked that adaptability is the key factor for leadership effectiveness and success. Adaptability is the key to CEOs' success in the current global business environment.

6. Acquire Learning Agility

It is essential for CEOs to acquire learning agility through executive education. Also, they must ensure that their employees are trained through leadership development training programs regularly. Currently there is a dearth of talent in the global leadership pipeline as the baby boomers retire. Hence, there is an urgent need for CEOs to spend time on talent acquisition, onboarding, development, and retention.

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**CEOs must articulate their vision effectively.**

with others. He created visual images and used them to connect with his people effectively. He was a great speaker who communicated well and articulated his vision effectively.

2. Carry All Stakeholders with You

Carrying all stakeholders, especially shareholders, board members, and customers, is a major challenge for CEOs because expectations are higher than ever. It is essential to make all stakeholders winners, although it is tough to satisfy them. John Mackey, the cofounder and co-CEO of Whole Foods, remarked, “At Whole Foods, whenever we make a decision, we want it to work for all stakeholders—employees, customers, investors, suppliers, the community, the environment.” Some CEOs have been fired because they could not live up to the expectations of their board members and shareholders. Therefore, it is crucial that CEOs be transparent with board members; they decide the fate of CEOs.

3. Emphasize Organizational Culture

Culture connects employees to create an emotional bonding to improve organizational bottom lines. For instance, A. G. Lafley of Procter & Gamble strives hard to connect people by emphasizing organizational culture. Strategy and culture are two eyes of an organization, with strategy as the guiding path and culture as the driving path. Balancing and blending both enhances CEO effectiveness.

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**Strategy and culture are two eyes of an organization.**
7. Encourage Innovation

Steve Jobs kept Apple healthy and strong by keeping competitors at bay through his innovative and inspiring leadership. When the technological world got into the so-called PC wars, Jobs took the path less traveled and became a trailblazer and a legend. He started as a small fish in a big pond and ultimately became a major source of innovation and excellence. He rewrote the rules of business and changed the way technology worked. He made a big difference to the lives of people through his technological contribution. Nobody expected that the man who was fired from his job as a CEO would return, be in command for fourteen years, and take his organization to such great heights.

8. See the Big Picture

CEOs must see impending challenges from multiple perspectives, requiring considerable business acumen. They must be able to forecast the future demands of their customers and clients. Visionary CEOs like Virgin’s Richard Branson and IBM’s Lou Gerstner have the innate ability to see the big picture. They could see what could not be seen by others. In 1993, when Gerstner took over as CEO of deeply troubled IBM, he said the company’s mission was to “survive.” In his book *Who Says Elephants Can’t Dance?*, he said that few people understood how perilously close IBM came to running out of cash. He could overcome the challenge because he saw the big picture.

9. Equip with Technical and Business Acumen

CEOs must possess both technical and business acumen. Steel tycoon Lakshmi Niwas Mittal encountered innumerable challenges when he acquired Arcelor Steel. His business battle turned out to be a political one. He led from the front to overcome the leadership challenges. He proved his critics wrong by displaying his business and technical acumen with timely judgment. He encountered several leadership challenges while consolidating the steel industry globally. His business philosophy is based on three strategies: acquisition, growth, and strategic alliances.

10. Overcome VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity)

The global business environment is highly dynamic and challenging. The competition is cut-throat. You must run a little faster than everybody else to keep your lead. It is tough to predict the very next moment because there is uncertainty everywhere, and there is no guarantee that the decisions that you make will deliver fruitful results. In 2011, Carlos Ghosn, the CEO of the Renault–Nissan Alliance, a strategic partnership between French carmaker Renault and Japanese automaker Nissan, had to confront several crises simultaneously, including the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan and flooding in Thailand—all of which hit the company’s supply chain. Ghosn responded quickly to overcome the challenges.

11. Manage Time

Prioritizing and managing time is a big challenge for CEOs. Because of rising expectations there is a continual pressure to do too many things within a limited time frame. Using time judiciously helps executives plan and manage activities effectively. It helps minimize pressure and maximize pleasure. It eliminates stress and helps ensure work–life balance. This means that CEOs must learn to prioritize tasks so that they focus on important activities rather than insignificant ones, and they must use their travel time productively.

12. Conquer Stress

Stress has become a major challenge for CEOs. They don’t find time to reflect, and yet a little bit of reflection every day is essential to productivity. What is the use of achieving success when there is no meaning to life? CEOs are under continual pressure from all stakeholders. This pressure is often passed on to lower
levels of the organization, resulting in low productivity and performance.

One way to tame stress is mindfulness, focusing on the present, not the past or future. CEOs must pursue hobbies and passions other than their work. The renowned management guru Peter Drucker led his life completely by pursuing the hobbies that were close to his heart. He pursued passions such as writing, consultancy and teaching, and hobbies such as mountain hiking and swimming. He balanced everything in his life—work, hobbies, and passions. He led his life completely, without having any regrets at the end.

13. Avoid Information Overload

In the past people have craved information, yet now must avoid having excessive amounts. With so much information available online, people may find it difficult to choose accurate and authentic information. Jim Collins advocated a “stop doing” list in his book, Good to Great. He cautioned, “If you have more than three priorities, you don’t have any.”

14. Learn When to Hold and When to Fold

CEOs must demonstrate flexible fortitude. They must know when to hold and when to fold, which is not always easy. It requires clarity in goal setting and prioritizing activities in harmony with organizational principles and philosophies. It requires an extraordinary sense of purpose and intuition to let go and move on, especially with the knowledge that we can’t completely control events in the future.

15. Be Bold to Lead in Turbulent Times

The present global business environment demands not only soft leaders but also hard leaders. When times are good, anyone can be at the helm. When the sailing is rough, the real leaders and CEOs come to the forefront to sail the ship successfully to the shore. Abraham Lincoln is an apt example of a leader who led America during turbulent times. When America had the two challenges of slavery and the Civil War, Lincoln demonstrated his leadership acumen by managing all stakeholders, including his political rivals, effectively to abolish slavery and ensure the unity of America. It is for this reason that many leaders look up to Lincoln whenever they encounter leadership challenges, whatever their political ideologies and countries.

16. Adapt Locally to Grow Globally

CEOs must emphasize growth and expansion both locally and globally. And it is a very big challenge, because the expectations and aspirations of local and global customers and clients are often different. It is indeed a tough task to balance both. It is essential to strengthen and grow locally to grow globally with a long view. That means there is a need for having both short-term and long-term goals for local and global needs. Remember, only when you grow locally will you be able to grow globally.

17. Appreciate Diversity

Appreciate the fact that the world is small and getting smaller. Every day there are more ways to connect physically and virtually. Additionally, rapid growth in technology has become both a boon and a bane.
It is essential to celebrate accomplishments but never get complacent.

for CEOs. People from different communities and countries work together to accomplish organizational goals and objectives. There is an urgent need to understand various cultures to develop cultural intelligence and competence. “Respect to all and disrespect to none” must be the slogan the CEOs preach and practice to lead in the current diversified global world.

18. Practice Continuous Dissatisfaction

It is essential to celebrate accomplishments, but never get complacent. Be prepared mentally for competitors to enter into your business always. Instead of resting on laurels, CEOs must deliver effectively to the satisfaction of all stakeholders, including customers, employees, financial institutions, board members, and shareholders. CEOs must always think of “what’s next” to move forward aggressively to pursue new opportunities.

19. Build Trust

Trust in business has been on a steep decline since the beginning of the Great Recession and before. There is a lack of trust in leaders and CEOs globally because of the collapse of global companies such as Enron, Tyco, Lehman Brothers, WorldCom, and Global Crossing. CEOs must build their trust and confidence among all the stakeholders globally. They must be transparent to build trust, and walk their talk to lead from the front.

Fortunately, there are many sources that CEOs and other executives can use to learn how to develop and maintain a sense of trust. For instance, David Horsager, in his 2012 book *The Trust Edge: How Top Leaders Gain Faster Results, Deeper Relationships, and a Stronger Bottom Line*, outlined eight ways to build trust: (1) provide clarity in your communication and action; (2) show compassion; (3) demonstrate character; (4) showcase your contribution; (5) model your competence; (6) develop connections; (7) demonstrate commitment; and (8) be consistent in your actions.

20. Avoid Clinging to Status Quo

CEOs must not cling to business models and systems that worked in the past, because what worked in the past and present might not work in the future. Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos has long avoided maintaining the status quo. He is a visionary leader with clarity in his approach to business. He turned selling books online into a multibillion-dollar business that has changed retailing forever.

21. Invest in the Future

Provide leadership development training programs to employees regularly. It helps them perform well and grow as leaders. For instance, Jack Welch shared his experiences through leadership development training programs at GE. Additionally, he spent more than half of his time meeting people, thinking about people, understanding people, reviewing people, hiring people, and interviewing people. ArcelorMittal, the biggest steel company in the world, conducts leadership development programs for its employees. It treats leadership as an integral part. It develops the next generation of leaders through initiatives such as ArcelorMittal University’s Leadership Academy and the global employee development program.
Conclusion

There are a number of other leadership challenges for CEOs globally. The biggest challenge is that the world has become so complex that leaders no longer have all the capabilities and the resources to create all the products and services that customers want.

The role of a CEO is not a bed of roses. In contrast, it can be a bed of thorns with unexpected challenges from all quarters. CEOs can find themselves between conflicting demands and are subject to an endless series of paradoxes and dilemmas. Hence, as a CEO, you must listen to your inner voice and do what is good ethically with a long view. You must understand that you need a range of skills to deal with the challenges arising out of the dynamic global business environment. Above all, you must ensure that your passion, energy, and vision are continually aligned with your organization. If you can win the hearts of your employees with healthy HR practices, and the wallets of your customers with constant care and continuous improvement of service, you can excel as a CEO.

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In the summer of 1992 I was a junior officer assigned to the US Army’s prestigious Berlin Brigade, whose Cold War mission to counter Soviet strength in Germany’s historic capital had changed drastically with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR. We would now be a rapid deployment force available for missions anywhere in Europe. Practically, this meant that a unit designed to fight on foot in a large city now had to be ready to take on tank formations anywhere on the continent. The transition was a huge challenge; frankly, many of the leaders had no idea how we were going to get the job done.

Then my six-hundred-man unit—5th Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment—part of the larger brigade—got a new commander who had some very clear ideas: we were not only going to accomplish the mission, we would exceed expectations.

Soon after joining us, Lieutenant Colonel Joe Rodriguez brought the organization’s leaders to a beautiful setting beside Berlin’s famous Lake Wannsee, where he spent an hour walking us through his background, his values, his eighteen-year military career, and even some of his childhood experiences. He let us see who he was and, most important, told us his expectations of our performance. He even claimed he knew our true potential.

I didn’t realize it at the time, but that was my first exposure to a written leadership philosophy. What happened afterward was nothing short of amazing. We went from being a pretty darn good unit to a great one. As I look back now—this one single hour is the
reason why—it was the genesis of our transformation and ascent to excellence. He let us know in no uncertain terms how we would perform as a team. Our values, our mission, our goals, and our standards were all made crystal clear. Within weeks, both our morale and pride were up. Naturally, peak performance followed. The culmination of our team growth was the following spring at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) in Hohenfels, Germany, where we did something that had never happened before. In a mock battle, we defeated, no, we crushed, an OPFOR (Opposing Forces) unit with superior equipment and battlefield insight. It was light Infantry (rifles and rucksacks) defeating armor (tanks and mechanized troops). The business equivalent would be a local mom-and-pop shop beating out Walmart or Target for exclusive rights to box stores in a city of a million people, or perhaps a ten-person start-up beating out IBM for a billion-dollar IT services contract.

You don’t have to be a military commander, a CEO, or even a gifted orator to inspire and motivate your team. You certainly don’t have to enter combat or conduct war games to prove your team’s capabilities. But, we can all take a lesson from LTC Joe Rodriguez and others like him who have taken the time to think through, develop, and then communicate a personal leadership philosophy.

I developed my written personal leadership philosophy and shared it with my company. In fact, it is part of ThunderCat Technology’s employee handbook. Over the past six years we have gone from $29 million to more than $400 million in revenues, and we were recently named in “Best Places to Work in Virginia” and as one of “America’s Most Promising Companies” by Forbes magazine. I have personally helped more than ninety people develop and communicate theirs as well. I have seen again and again the impact that it can have on careers and companies.

What Exactly Is a Personal Leadership Philosophy?

Writing a philosophy is a very personal exercise and must begin with answering some serious questions about who you are, what you believe in, what you value, what your priorities are, and what your expectations are of yourself and others.

Quite simply, a personal leadership philosophy is nothing more than a written statement that is developed to help you communicate to your team how they will perform. I have seen many versions, including seventeen bullet points, a PowerPoint with pictures, and one that resembled a sonnet. In general, the things you should include are

- **Personal Values**: What you believe in, such as honesty, commitment, respect for others
- **How You Will Work**: Description of how you will carry out your responsibilities
- **Expectations**: What you expect of others and what they can expect of you
- **Non-negotiables**: What you will demand and what you will not tolerate
- **Priorities**: What’s important, and in what order
- **Personal Idiosyncrasies**: Your peculiar likes or “pet peeves”
- **Commitment**: Your willingness for feedback

If this seems a bit much or too detailed, consider that all you are trying to communicate is quite simple: What I believe, what you can expect of me, what I expect of you, and how we can work best together.

How Should I Develop It?

The philosophy will be effective only if it is read, so keep it short. Most leaders are able to keep theirs to
Define what you think an effective leader should do.

Define what you think an effective leader should do. The best way to do this is make a list of the qualities of the best and worst leaders you have known.

Step 1. Define what you think an effective leader should do. The best way to do this is make a list of the qualities of the best and worst leaders you have known.

Step 2. Compare and contrast the “best” and “worst” lists.

Step 3. Using your descriptions, analyze your leadership style and personality. What top three or four characteristics do you want to be known for? Put them in writing as if you were explaining them to your child. State the ethical rules you infer from these values.

Step 4. Now that you have your values and ethical rules, translate these into leadership principles that you will model and that you want to see in others. Again, clearly articulate them. It is not enough to state platitudes like “integrity” or “customer first.” You need to explain what that means and looks like in action.

Step 5. Finally, add in your particular likes and dislikes, your “hot buttons” or “pet peeves.”

Step 6. At this point, you should have the first draft of your philosophy. Review it and then set it aside for at least a week. After the week is up, review it again, make corrections, and set it aside for another week. Keep doing this until you are satisfied with the philosophy. Share it with some close advisors and mentors—get feedback and refine. When you are ready, share it with your team.

Don’t get overwhelmed and think you have to follow these exact steps or the formats you see others using. Those are just guides and tools to help you. The main thing is to think and capture your thoughts, however it feels right and comfortable to you. Don’t overcook it. You are not trying to craft some perfect essay. A rough draft or some scribbled notes is better than nothing at all.

One resource you can use is a book called The Leader’s Compass. It was written by Ed Ruggero, West Point graduate, military historian, and the author of eleven books with Dennis Haley, Annapolis graduate, successful CEO, and the founder of Academy Leadership. It contains several samples of personal leadership philosophies. After attending one of their courses three years ago, I am now on their board of advisors and do workshops once or twice a year for Academy Leadership, LLC. Another popular recent book is One Piece of Paper by Mike Figliuolo. It guides you through a simple approach for creating, articulating, and living your personal leadership philosophy—one that can be shared on a single piece of paper.

A quick Google search of “personal leadership philosophy” or “written leadership philosophy” will also pull up a series of websites, resources, articles, and white papers, including eHow. Read a few, and feel free to cut and paste sentences, words, and pieces that resonate with you to help you write your own. But the end product must be your own. Keep in mind the personal in “personal leadership philosophy.” It is yours and yours alone. That doesn’t mean you can’t review and integrate pieces and parts of others that you like—there are literally thousands out there in practice today. It needs to fit your style and your unique voice.

What Do I Do with It?

Your personal leadership philosophy is more than just a document. Simply by going through the deep reflection, the development exercise, and the discipline of concisely writing it down, you will already come out with greater self-knowledge, greater self-confidence, and greater personal energy. But once you are satisfied with it, share it and live it.
It needs to fit your style and your unique voice.

There are many ways to share it. I have seen it read aloud to a gathered group, published as an outlook meeting invitation for the person come discuss it, or, like me, published to a group and then discussed individually over time. One president posts it prominently in all of his factories and office buildings, and his new customers regularly ask for copies. A start-up CEO I know uses it as a recruiting tool for prospective new employees. Others have used them during internal interview boards to get a promotion or attach it as part of their résumés.

This clearly isn’t meant to be just a speech, and certainly not an edict. The purpose is to truly engage your people in a dialogue about it. It is not a set of commandments or demands. Keep in mind that in your personal leadership philosophy you commit to certain behaviors as well. It is a great way to give people permission to give you feedback and invite them to tell you how you are doing. They are accountable to you, but you are accountable to them as well.

Don’t do this once and forget about it. Continue to emphasize your philosophy and what it means to your people in their day-to-day work lives. Find ways to repeat it and reinforce it on a regular basis so people internalize it.

A personal leadership philosophy is often called a leader’s compass. A compass is something you use for direction, guidance, and most important, for setting a course in a storm. In times of crisis it is always important to reflect on your values as you face challenges and tough choices. Your leader’s compass can provide that moral guide and give you the courage to always do the right thing in any circumstance for you and your entire team.

Finally, and most important, make sure you live by your own philosophy.

So . . . Why Have a Written Leadership Philosophy?

You have seen leaders come and go, and you’ve seen some succeed and others fail. Have you ever wondered what explains this? The US Army and US Navy have researched the leadership phenomena for years. Both have produced excellent summaries: The US Army’s Excellence in the Combat Arms and the Navy’s Command Excellence. What those summaries indicate is that a widely communicated leadership philosophy and a vision of what the leader wants an organization to be are essential to being an effective leader. One of the key first steps in becoming a leader is to develop and articulate this personal leadership philosophy statement.

When you write and follow your leader’s compass you will be a more effective leader and experience less stress. You will energize your people and set them free. Your people will admire you for being authentic. You will be on course for leadership success.

Juan Dominguez is a district general manager with SimplexGrinnell, a company that specializes in fire alarm, sprinkler, integrated security, and emergency communications systems. He shared his leadership philosophy with his employees in 2010 and saw a 10 percent increase in revenues and 15 percent increase in profit the following year. Coincidence? He says it isn’t.

A personal leadership philosophy is often called a leader’s compass.
But I will say that I sincerely believe leaders who think about values, reflect, and communicate how they want to lead their teams significantly increase their chances of success.

Convinced yet? Consider what happens when a leader fails to communicate a philosophy, establish a future vision, or develop a system to measure progress toward that vision:

- People second-guess the leader.
- People trying to “discover” the leader’s intent leads to piecemeal revision and initiation of policies and procedures.
- Resources may be used inappropriately as priorities change.
- Building your teams’ trust and confidence can be delayed or can fail completely.

In short, all the time and energy that could be spent molding a better organization is wasted on guessing what the boss wants. No leader intentionally programs this, but it happens. The time needed to correct it can affect that leader and the organization’s overall performance.

In the end, the most important outcome of this is to open dialogue and engage your team members in a discussion. This is simply one vehicle to start that powerful conversation.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The day after I arrived in Baghdad in the spring of 2006 I pulled my Special Operations team into a 10 × 10 room with a bed, a desk, and a rusted metal locker. We sat on the floor together and I pulled out a small notebook I had scribbled some notes in. I told them my background, my values, my strengths, and even my weaknesses. I discussed our mission for the next year, laid out my expectations, and ended by committing to do my very best every single day to keep them safe and get them home to their loved ones. Over the next two hours, we all shared our goals, our strengths, and our respective weaknesses. Even though we had trained together for months prior to our arrival as “boots on
“ground,” this was really the first time we sat, reflected on the enormous task in front of us, got to know one another, and truly bonded as a team. We left the wire on our first mission the next day anxious and nervous but equally excited. We were focused on our mission and on each other. We were a team, and I know that in the five months we were together we made a real difference in the Sadr City slums.

Followers expect leaders to show them the standard and give them the training and resources to reach it. They expect leaders to lead by example. Additionally, they expect leaders to keep them informed and to care for them. Leaders may have to ask others to make extraordinary sacrifices to achieve goals. Leaders may have to call on them to do things that seem impossible. If leaders have trained their people to standard, inspired their willingness, and consistently looked after their interests, their teams will be prepared to accomplish any goal, anytime, anywhere.

Publishing a leadership philosophy helps create an environment for these things to happen. It enables leaders to discover what they stand for, what’s important to them, and articulate this to followers. Followers know the leader’s expectations and how the leader is most likely to act. This process leads to mutual trust and confidence and builds a stable foundation upon which long-term relations can be built and organizational effectiveness achieved.

Obviously, the written leadership philosophy is only the beginning of your leadership journey and the transformation of your people into a high-performance team. But it is also a very important first step. So take the time and start yours today. Both you and your team will be glad you did.

Tom Deierlein, a 1989 graduate of West Point, is CEO of ThunderCat Technology. A Bronze Star and Purple Heart recipient, he is an Airborne Ranger, retired US Army major and Operation Iraqi Freedom vet. Tom is a certified peer mentor with Wounded Warrior Project and USSOCOM Care Coalition. He is cofounder of TD Foundation, a 501(c)(3) that helps needy children affected by war. Tom earned a master of science degree in systems management from the University of Southern California and an MBA from New York University.
When Alan Mulally was appointed CEO of Ford Motor Company in 2006, sales, market share, and profits were falling, and the automaker’s culture consisted of silo rivalries with leaders embroiled in turf wars. This culture drove Ford to the verge of bankruptcy. By the time Mulally announced his retirement in May 2014, he had led Ford to nineteen consecutive profitable quarters and rising market share in North America. And unlike American rivals General Motors and Chrysler, Ford did not seek a U.S. government bailout following the financial crisis in 2008.

Alan Mulally’s success was aided by his leadership style and the corporate culture he developed. The connection Ford employees experienced with Mulally and with each other helped achieve the turnaround. Let’s examine how he connected with the people he was responsible for leading through shared identity, empathy, and understanding.

This article is adapted from Connection Culture: The Competitive Advantage of Shared Identity, Empathy and Understanding at Work.
Shared identity is how the members of a group think of themselves. It is based on a mix of vision, mission, values, and reputation. Mulally created a shared identity by using Henry Ford’s original vision of “opening the highways for all mankind” to express how the company makes the world a better place by serving others. He explained that Ford gives people freedom of mobility so they can access opportunities for growth. This united employees around the vision and focused them on a cause greater than self. The vision was also factored into decision-making processes, such as in evaluations of new product development. For example, the newly designed F-150 pickup featured an aluminum-based body that made it lighter, more fuel efficient, and more affordable.

Shared empathy comes about when people care for others as much as they care for themselves. Mulally developed shared empathy through several actions that made valuing people and helping one another part of the Ford culture. He frequently used the phrases “One Ford,” “one team,” “the power of teams,” and “working together always works.” He also distributed wallet-sized cards with Ford’s business plan on one side and sixteen expected behaviors (values), including “Work together effectively as one team,” on the other. In meetings, he acted as a facilitator and coach rather than a dictator, prohibiting humor made at the expense of others. Rather than thinking of other individuals and organizations as competitors, Mulally employed a “win-win” approach to negotiations. This helped him forge an agreement with the United Auto Workers union to make the changes necessary for Ford to make a profit in return for bringing production back to the United States. It also helped him consolidate Ford’s purchases to suppliers who were willing to partner with Ford to drive down costs in return for receiving a greater share of Ford’s business.

Shared understanding is brought about when there is good two-way communication. Mulally gave people a voice through which to share their ideas and opinions with one another. He expected leaders to openly share the obstacles they faced and celebrated leaders who helped one another instead of focusing solely on problems in their domain. Another way he increased voice was through the weekly business plan review (BPR) meeting. Held at Ford’s global headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan, the BPR is attended by the global leadership team and all business and functional leaders, either in person or by teleconference. At BPR meetings, leaders give updates on their goals, which are color coded green for on target, yellow for at risk, and red for off target. When problems are identified, follow-up meetings are scheduled to dig deeper and identify solutions. BPRs also address strategic topics, such as the economy, labor supply, and competitive developments. Feedback is encouraged during BPRs, which have a safe environment for honest dialogue. This facilitates moving toward consensus, rather than forcing it, and helps decision makers identify optimal solutions which make alignment and excellence in execution more likely.

Together, shared identity, empathy, and understanding create what we refer to as a “connection culture,” as shown in figures 1 and 2. A workplace culture is made up of the predominant ways people think, behave, and work within a particular work group. Connection culture provides a new way of thinking about leadership based on the universal human need to feel connected to a group (which is in contrast to feeling unsupported, left out, or lonely). This type of culture creates a bond that moves primarily self-centered individuals toward group-centered membership.

Three Cultures: Connection, Control, Indifference

Connection cultures stand in contrast to cultures of control and cultures of indifference. In cultures

Cultures of indifference are predominant today.
Connection Helps Organizations and Individuals Thrive

Many studies confirm the positive effect connection has on organizational health and performance. Here is a small sampling:

- In 2012, Gallup researched 49,929 business or work units, comprising 1.4 million employees within 192 organizations across 34 nations. Its research concluded that business units with higher engagement and connection experienced 21 percent higher productivity levels, 22 percent higher profitability, 10 percent higher customer metrics, 41 percent fewer quality defects, 48 percent fewer safety accidents, and 37 percent lower employee turnover. Furthermore, business or work units that ranked in the top half of employee engagement/connection scores were twice as likely to succeed than units in the bottom half.

- In 2012, the Hay Group reported it studied more than four hundred companies for more than seven years and found that companies with top quartile engagement/connection scores grew revenues connection helps overcome the differences that historically divided people; it creates a sense of connection, community, and unity that is inclusive and energizing, and spurs productivity and innovation.

Cultures of indifference (as illustrated in figure 3) are predominant today. In this type of culture, people are so busy chasing money, power, and status that they fail to invest the time necessary to develop healthy, supportive relationships. As a result, leaders don’t see value in the relational nature of work, and many people struggle with loneliness. Employees may feel like a cog in a machine, unimportant, uncertain, or invisible.

Both of these cultures sabotage individual and organizational performance—feeling consistently unsupported, left out, or lonely takes a toll. Without psychological resources to cope with the normal stress of modern organizational life, employees may turn to unhealthy attitudes and behaviors, many of which are addictive and destructive.

In a connection culture, people care about others and care about their work because it benefits other human beings. They invest the time to develop healthy relationships and reach out to help others in need rather than be indifferent to them. This bond

![Figure 1. Connection in Organizational Cultures](image-url)
by 2.5 to 4.5 times as much as companies with bottom quartile engagement and connection scores.

• In 2004, the Corporate Leadership Council conducted a global research study of fifty thousand individuals and found that employees who feel engaged and connected are 20 percent more productive than the average employee and 87 percent less likely to leave the organization.

Feeling connected to other people has been found to affect the human body.

Connection is a superpower. At least, that’s how UCLA neuroscience professor Matthew Lieberman has described it, because connection makes us smarter, happier, and more productive. A plethora of research exists that supports this view. Children in early childhood who feel securely connected to others develop superior social skills, confidence, curiosity and exploratory behavior, enthusiasm, persistence in problem solving, and the ability to cope with ambiguity, change, and stress. Research shows that feelings of connection affect neurotransmitters (chemical messengers in the brain, including serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine), hormones (chemical messengers that travel throughout the body, including adrenaline, cortisol, oxytocin, and vasopressin), and enzymes that affect chromosomes (such as telomerase). These biochemicals help us thrive and live longer. However, a lack of connection negatively affects them, and a sustained connection deficit can cause dysfunction and even increase the likelihood of premature death.
Connection makes us smarter, happier, and more productive.

We’ve seen the importance of connection affirmed in research on wellness and well-being. The following are just a few of the positive influences of connection, according to Gallup Research:

- Individuals who have the highest well-being get an average of six hours of social time (connection) each day through face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, and Internet interactions.
- The single best predictor of employee engagement is whom people are with (connection), rather than what they are doing (tasks).
- Self-control and goal accomplishment are positively correlated to connection, especially in regard to diet and exercise. A study showed that a ten-month intensive weight-loss program was maintained only 24 percent of the time when undertaken alone, but had a success rate of 50 percent when undertaken with a group of three strangers and 66 percent when undertaken with three friends or colleagues.

The Current State of Connection

When connection declines, feelings of stability and security diminish and are often replaced by a sense of loneliness, frequently coupled with depression, although they are distinct experiences. The most extreme feelings of disconnection come when people feel left out (referred to as “social exclusion”). This feeling is particularly destructive. Research on the effects of social exclusion has found that it makes people more aggressive toward those who excluded them and toward innocent bystanders; results in self-defeating behavior, including excessive risk taking, procrastination, and unhealthy diets; reduces intelligent thought, including logic and reasoning skills; and diminishes willpower to persevere on frustrating tasks.

Unfortunately, studies show that connection is on the decline. Thanks to modern technology and the increased pace of today’s business world, many people have less time to connect at home because they are spending more time at work or monitoring work from home via mobile devices. Some families, nuclear or extended, have chosen to spread out geographically to pursue economic opportunities, which results in less time spent connecting. Longer commute times also affect the amount of time available for connecting. Other factors that may also contribute to declining connection include historically high divorce rates (which have recently been on the decline because of lower marriage rates), more two-parent working families, lower participation in community organizations including faith-based communities, higher layoffs and employee turnover, a productivity push in workplaces that has squeezed out time for people to connect in the office, and increased media use (television, online, mobile devices, gaming) that crowds out time previously spent connecting face to face.

The decline of connection increases the likelihood that organizations and individuals will be dysfunctional.

When people feel disconnected, they are vulnerable to stress.
When people feel disconnected, they are vulnerable to stress. The combination of rising stress and declining psychological resources results in a volatile mix.

**Putting the Power of Connection to Work**

An organization that values connection and has leaders who are intentional about creating and fostering a connection culture will see positive results. Our firm has identified fifteen building blocks that create a connection culture. Here are three to get you started.

1. **Hire, develop, and promote for competence and connection skills.**

   Most managers hire and promote for competence, but they often are not as intentional about assessing connection skills. Involve many individuals in your organization’s hiring and promotion processes. Have them compare notes by taking into consideration your organization’s values and character strengths that increase connection, such as passion for excellence, fairness, honesty, and humility, before making hiring and promotion recommendations.

   New employee orientation and new leader training must also address connection. Creating a connection culture requires developing a certain mind-set in leaders. Education is essential. In order for your leaders to support your ideas, they must understand what a connection culture is, why it’s important, and how they can create and sustain it. This information must be communicated to all current leaders during leadership training sessions and incorporated into new leader orientation.

   Having a mix of subcultures is typical in organizations that are not intentional when developing culture. Although some outstanding senior leaders are able to rely on interactions with people to identify pockets of disconnection throughout the organization, it is rare to find a leader who has the time to do this well. Most leaders are mistaken in their assessment of the engagement and connection of people they lead. As a result, they don’t recognize an employee engagement problem until they feel the pain from underperformance or face reality in the form of poor results from an employee engagement and connection survey. Thus, conducting employee engagement and connection surveys on an annual basis is a best practice, providing a systematic way to assess connection and hold leaders responsible for creating connection cultures. The survey should ask all employees how their team, department, and organization are doing when and if they act in ways that are consistent with the organization’s values. It can be designed to pinpoint where the organization’s values are being met and where connection cultures, cultures of control, and cultures of indifference are found within an organization.

2. **Help people develop connection skills.**

   Everyone in your organization needs to develop connection skills, especially leaders. Managers lead from authority, whereas leaders lead from a combination of authority and connection. It is not unusual for managers who are good at organizing tasks to require help developing the personal leadership skills necessary to better connect and maintain a connection with people. Weak connection skills hold many a manager back from becoming a leader whom people want to follow. The following list of attitudes, language, and behaviors will help to facilitate connection.

   Recognize varying connection needs. People have different predispositions in their sensitivities to feeling connection or its absence. People also respond differently to actions and whether they make them feel connected. Learn about the people you lead, and tailor your behaviors to connect based on what you’ve learned about each individual.

   It has been said that attention is oxygen for relationships. When meeting with people, get in the habit of being present by giving them your full attention. Show that you are engaged and interested by asking questions and then asking follow-up questions to clarify. Listen carefully, observing facial expressions and body cues. Don’t break
It has been said that attention is oxygen for relationships.

the connection by checking your phone, looking around the room, or letting your mind wander.

Develop the habit of emphasizing positives. Psychologist John Gottman first observed that marriages were less likely to survive when the positive/negative ratio of interactions dipped below 5 to 1 (or five positive interactions to every negative interaction). More recently, psychologist Barbara Fredrickson found that a positivity ratio also applies in the workplace. People need affirmation and recognition, so get in the habit of looking for ways to affirm and serve others. Do this by looking for task strengths and character strengths that reflect the excellence of a person’s work and the way that person goes about her work, respectively.

You can build connections with people during negotiations if you adopt and maintain the right mind-set. Thinking of the people you are negotiating with as competitors leads to disconnection and distrust. Instead, think of them as holding knowledge that you need in order to identify a win-win solution. This requires probing, patience, and perseverance to understand other people’s objectives, perceptions, and sensitivities.

3. Establish forums for decision input and idea development.

Holding knowledge flow sessions is a practice that promotes connection through open communications—listening to others’ opinions and ideas, and then considering them before making decisions. Team knowledge flow sessions should occur regularly to keep the team aligned and accountable (one organization we know calls their weekly operational knowledge flow session the Sweat the Details meeting).

People will often have differences of opinion, and leaders should assure those in the knowledge flow session that constructive friction is healthy and desirable. With this understanding, holding and voicing opposing views shouldn’t grow into combat. The key to maintaining healthy constructive friction is to make sure you are trying to “get it right” to promote task excellence rather than “be right” for the purpose of personal pride. Furthermore, civility should be encouraged, especially as individuals work through their differences.

Begin meetings with positive comments to boost energy and creativity. Share your vision—your thoughts about what actions need to be done, by whom, and when each action needs to be completed. After leading with vision, say something like, “We will be our best only when we all share our ideas and opinions.” Encourage dialogue by asking what’s right, what’s wrong, and what’s missing from your own thinking. Everyone’s opinions and ideas should be considered, so make sure to ask people who are quiet to share what they think. Listen and consider the ideas put forth and implement good ideas, giving credit where it’s due. This practice reflects the character strengths of integrity, humility, curiosity, and open-mindedness. After each knowledge flow session, follow up in writing to summarize what you heard, what actions are necessary, who is responsible for each action, and when each action should be completed.

Conclusion

As you consider the culture of your organization, keep in mind that culture can be “local.” Although you personally may be operating within a connection culture, are there other leaders in your organization whose colleagues would say are allowing or even promoting cultures of control or indifference?
Like Alan Mulally, create a connection culture and watch what happens. Your organization’s employees will exert greater discretionary effort in their work, align their behavior with organizational goals, actively communicate to help improve decisionmaking, and actively contribute to innovation. These and other benefits help achieve sustainable superior performance and provide a competitive advantage.

Michael Lee Stallard is cofounder and president of E Pluribus Partners. He speaks, teaches, and consults for a wide variety of business, government, education, and healthcare organizations. Michael is the primary author of Connection Culture: The Competitive Advantage of Shared Identity, Empathy and Understanding at Work and Fired Up or Burned Out: How to Reignite Your Team’s Passion, Creativity and Productivity, and he has contributed to many other books and leadership publications worldwide. Prior to founding E Pluribus Partners, Michael was chief marketing officer for businesses at Morgan Stanley and Charles Schwab.

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On June 23, 2008, I was nominated by then-President George W. Bush to be the first woman to become a four-star general in the history of the U.S. military. A little less than five months later—on November 14, 2008—I was standing in the largest auditorium in the Pentagon, waiting to begin the ceremony that would make my promotion official. As the room filled with friends and family, military dignitaries and war heroes, colleagues, and mentors from throughout my long career with the U.S. Army, I pushed away the stage fright that threatened to grip me. This speech promised to be the speech of my life.

It was a long road to this day—one that both challenged and rewarded me at almost every turn. Along the way, I learned what true leadership is all about, and I had the distinct honor of serving with some of the greatest men and women you could ever hope to meet. I am deeply proud of my service to my country, and of the men and women who dedicate—and sometimes give—their lives to protect each and every one of us.

I personally believe that one of the most important jobs of any leader is setting the standard for his or her organization. The very best leaders set the bar high, and then challenge and support their people as they work to attain it. The least-effective leaders I know set their standards low, or they don’t set them at all. As a result, their organizations—and the people who work for them—are chronic underperformers.

This, fortunately, doesn’t have to be the case. Here are some of the lessons I have learned from a lifetime of leadership.

**Live to a Higher Standard**

Few people come to work saying “I want to be average today.” As leaders and potential leaders, we want to excel, and to make a real difference in the lives of those around us.
and in the companies and organizations we devote so much of our lives to. During the course of my life and career, I learned the importance of living life to a higher standard, and this idea is the foundation of my personal leadership philosophy.

We all have standards to meet in any job, and we are expected to meet them. If we don’t, we may soon find ourselves out of a job. However, those exceptional men and women who push themselves not just to meet the standard, but to consistently exceed it, send a very clear message about their own competence and character.

As a leader moving up the ladder of success, who do you think is going to be tapped by upper management for promotion? That’s right—the person who lives to a higher standard. And as an employee, who do you think is going to be actively recruited, rewarded, and retained—during both good times and bad? Right again—the men and women who live their lives to a higher standard.

The choice is yours to make: Be average, or be exceptional. After managing nearly sixty-nine thousand people during the course of my career, it’s clear to me that the decision you make is the difference between the leaders who find great success and those who fail. It’s in the way their minds work, in their attention to the details of running their organizations, and in the execution that inspires and motivates their people to live to a higher standard. It allows them to create high-performing organizations that are built to last.

Never Walk By a Mistake

When I first joined the Army, I thought it might be an interesting thing to do for a short while. I planned to stay only for two years, and then I would move on to something else. What that something else would be, I wasn’t sure—I thought maybe a physical education teacher or a coach. However, this all changed when I met Sergeant First Class Wendell Bowen.

I was a second lieutenant—still green and unproven—assigned to lead my first platoon, and Sergeant Bowen was my first platoon sergeant. The Army was going through a very dark period at the time. The Vietnam War was winding down, and the fact that we had not scored a decisive victory in the conflict was demoralizing. Added to that, the Army had been clobbered with deep budget cuts, drug and alcohol abuse was widespread, and racial tensions were high.

I’ll never forget his words that first day, when I reported to duty at Fort Sill, Oklahoma: “Lieutenant Dunwoody, I’m going to make you the best platoon leader in the United States Army.” I was inspired by his words, and something deep inside me wanted to prove him right.

Sergeant Bowen represented all that was good about the Army—he was a Vietnam veteran with a strong work ethic, a disarming smile, and he radiated an inner strength and confidence that was inspiring to anyone who met him. It was my good fortune to be mentored by the man who was my direct report. He briefed me on the details of my job as a platoon leader—the schedules, routines, and expectations—and he pushed me to commit to heart Army policy on everything from how to run a repair parts shop to how to wear the uniform.

I owe a great debt to Sergeant Bowen—he made me a better soldier, and a better leader. The wisdom he shared helped to guide me through every step of my military career, and I still carry it with me today.

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• Sergeant Bowen vowed to make me the best platoon leader in the Army, not the best female platoon leader in the Army. He knew that the best way for people to coexist together—regardless of race or gender—was to respect one another.

• He showed me what right looks like. The military has all sorts of rules, regulations, and traditions—
It’s easy for leaders to let the small things slide.

everything from marching in cadence to how to make a bed correctly—and they all help to build discipline, teamwork, and an acute attention to detail. Although some of these things might seem trivial to an outsider, they can mean the difference between victory and defeat, life and death.

• Sergeant Bowen taught me never to walk by a mistake. It’s easy for leaders to let the small things slide—to accept performance that doesn’t meet the standard, much less exceed it. When you walk by a mistake and let it go, you are setting a new, lower standard for your people to follow. And you can and should expect them to do just that.

• He demonstrated why you should be true to yourself. You don’t have to be Rambo to excel in the Army, and women don’t have to forgo their femininity and the things that make them different from men to be full-fledged members of the team. We just have to be professional and meet (and hopefully exceed) the standard.

Form Your Winning Team

When I took command of the Army Materiel Command (AMC) in 2008, with its $47 billion budget, had it been a business, the organization I was responsible for would have ranked 47th on the Fortune 500 list, between Lowe’s and Time Warner. AMC is responsible for everything from the distribution and maintenance of spare parts—all around the world—to the development of highly sophisticated weapons systems. As such, it operates supply depots, ammunition plants, and arsenals, and it is responsible for research, development, and engineering centers for the Army. It’s said that if a soldier shoots it, drives it, flies it, wears it, communicates with it, or eats it, AMC produces and provides it.

As the commander of AMC, it was critical that I build a team—a cohesive group of men and women, all working together to achieve our organization’s important goals. Our warfighters depended on us getting our jobs done right, and right on time. This meant taking charge of the organization and the people within it, but it also meant being a coach—coaching and building professional, high-performing units in the U.S. Army.

In my experience, the best leaders are good coaches. They motivate by being seen, by communicating, by engaging, and by looking out for their employees. They set and enforce high standards, and they reward good performance—and correct poor performance.

Even today—three years after retiring from the Army, I can’t let poor performance go unnoticed, nor unremarked. If I see a soldier in a store after work in a brown T-shirt—and without his combat uniform jacket—I won’t hesitate to stop him and point it out. Or if I see a soldier whose haircut is not within regulation, I’ll be sure to point that out too. What was it that General Douglas MacArthur famously said about old soldiers never dying? This general is definitely not ready to fade away.

The point is that you should never accept second best, whether on the job or in your personal life. The excellence of your team depends on it.

A good friend of mine was driving behind a garbage truck on trash pickup day. The driver of the truck wasn’t paying attention to what he was doing, and trash

You don’t have to be Rambo to excel in the Army.
You should never accept second best.

was flying out of the truck and all over the highway—creating quite a mess in his wake.

On the truck was posted one of those signs you often see on business vehicles: “How’s my driving? Call xxx-xxxx to report any problem.” My friend quickly called the phone number, and he asked the manager, who answered, “Are you in the trash collection business, or the trash scattering business?” The manager thanked my friend for his call and asked him for his phone number.

A short time later, the manager of the business called back my friend, saying that he had talked with the offending driver and corrected the problem. Though to some a problem like this might seem to be a small problem—what’s the harm in some trash flying around the highway, after all—in reality, this falling debris could lead to accidents and death.

Effective leaders coach their employees to correct the small problems before catastrophe strikes, and they reward them when they do. It’s amazing just how far a sincere and timely word of thanks can go in motivating someone to go above and beyond the standard.

Be a Leader of Leaders

I was fortunate to have some great role models in my life, starting with my father and mother. My father taught me the military values that served me so well in my own career, and my mother taught me the family values that we all need to learn and apply—both on and off the job.

My father is a career military man who fought in three wars. He was seriously wounded in Germany during World War II, led a battalion into combat during the Korean War (where he was again wounded), and he fought in Vietnam. During the course of his career, among other decorations, he earned the Distinguished Service Cross and two Purple Hearts. He is truly my hero.

My mother is the one who kept our family on an even keel while my father fought in Germany, Korea, and Vietnam, and during our many moves from base to base all around the world. Despite the challenges of building a stable household for my siblings and me, she set her standards high—and accomplished them with confidence and grace, building a home filled with love, God, and accountability.

Both my father and my mother taught me the importance of setting a higher standard and then never compromising it. On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait, triggering international condemnation. In response, President George H. W. Bush announced Operation Desert Shield, meant to protect Saudi Arabia from an Iraqi attack. This was followed by Operation Desert Storm in January 1991—the war to remove Iraq from Kuwait, led by the United States and supported by a large coalition of allied nations.

As I prepared to deploy to Saudi Arabia with the 82nd Airborne Division during these operations, my father—who had witnessed the ugly side of war firsthand, and was anxious about me being in a combat zone—left me with some parting advice that I have applied often in both my service and everyday life:

• If you don’t think you’re the best at what you do, no one else will. (Be confident in your training, your experience, and your abilities, and don’t be afraid to lead.)

• If winning isn’t everything, why bother playing? (I took this to mean, “Be a fighter, and don’t give up on the things you believe in.”)

• The higher up the flagpole you ascend, the more your tail end is exposed. (The truth of the matter is that, the higher your rank—whether military or civilian—the more visibility you and your actions have.)
We all need good role models and mentors in our lives. As a leader, this is an important part of your job—to be a leader of leaders. Your people look up to you, and if you lead well—and set a good example—they will follow. When you set a higher standard, they will follow you there too, and your people—your organization, your customers, and you—will all benefit. And to me, that is what true leadership is all about.

General Ann Dunwoody is the former commanding general of one of the Army’s largest commands, the U.S. Army Materiel Command. She is the first woman in U.S. military history to achieve a four-star officer rank, and she led many divisions at home and abroad—commanding at every level and supporting the largest deployment and redeployment of U.S. forces since World War II. Dunwoody is author of the book A Higher Standard: Leadership Strategies from America’s First Female Four-Star General.

The Soldier’s Creed

Each of the military services has its own unique creed—a formal statement of beliefs for people to live or work by. The Soldier’s Creed was developed by the U.S. Army to help guide the actions of men and women within this branch of the armed services.

I am an American Soldier.
I am a warrior and a member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.

I will always place the mission first.
I will never accept defeat.
I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.
I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.
I am an American Soldier.