

# Valuing Leadership in an Era of Prophets, Politicians, and Pugilists

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The move to a quality culture is a refreshing and courageous concept that, in the long term, can only make the Air Force more capable of performing its wartime mission. However, in our feverish rush to implement quality, we run the very real risk of changing a warrior culture whose values were once embedded in the art of personal mastery<sup>1</sup> and coup d'oeil<sup>2</sup> to a culture that emphasizes scientific models and broadbrushed, committee-based compromise and consensus. Further, in a parallel and equally blinding effort to build quality teams, we may be sacrificing the development of our future leaders and creating a generation of soft-skilled quality bureaucrats focused on politics and group process. Such people would lack the personal courage, vision, and situationally driven read-and-act skills<sup>3</sup> required to take definitive and timely action in a manner consistent with our great leaders of the past.

To successfully implement quality in the US Air Force, one must first comprehend the overriding attributes associated with nurturing our most important characteristic—leadership. Few writers have defined the essence of our calling more succinctly than Gen Douglas MacArthur, who wrote, “Duty, honor, country: Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be.”<sup>4</sup> MacArthur clearly suggested that these were the virtues by which our military careers should be measured.

If duty, honor, and country provide the long-term direction or vision for our travels, then what innate force should keep us on that path? Gen Ira Eaker suggested that a leader possesses strength of integrity, wisdom, and courage and that these characteristics alone provide the focus to keep one on the proper course in life.<sup>5</sup> Carl von Clausewitz also struggled with the attributes of leadership before outlining the qualities consistent with a military genius: (1) courage (both moral [“courage to accept responsibility”] and physical [“courage in the face of personal danger”]) and (2) power of intellect (“War is . . . wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty.

A sensitive and discriminating judgment is called for”).<sup>6</sup> From these characteristics, Clausewitz derived two others: (1) coup d'oeil (the inner eye or the “quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection”)<sup>7</sup> and (2) determination (“the capacity, having taken a decision, to stick to it”).<sup>8</sup>

Clausewitz links these concepts by saying that leaders must have “*first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to the truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light, wherever it may lead*” (emphasis in original).<sup>9</sup> Regardless of how we might describe it, the art of leadership is best built on wisdom and honor, focused on service to country, and fueled by the desire to develop coup d'oeil. Our professional military education (PME) schools reinforce these tenets, but does our emerging quality culture do the same?

To answer this question, one must not battle the conceptual foundation of quality, but the reality of its implementation in the USAF. Years ago, leaders emerged who possessed the wisdom to see and tackle abstract problems in minimal time. Today, we run the danger of tasking teams to wrestle with problems simply because our leaders are not adequately prepared to do so. Though this situation is expected and acceptable in complex situations, *it must not become the norm.*

Clearly, the Air Force is rapidly moving away from what Peter Senge calls personal mastery, mentioned above, into what I call the pseudosynergy of everyday quality teams. As we strive to cut costs and manpower, we spread our responsibilities over a wider spectrum of areas, robbing leaders and subordinates alike of the ability to develop and sustain personal mastery. Without personal mastery, we are collectively and insidiously transformed into a diluted intellectual pool that may or may not produce the tough answers required. If the resultant teams are overused and ill led, the individuals on those teams gradually lose both the power of independent thought and the creative courage associated with risk taking.

The litmus test for team formation should be, Is the challenge so timely, complex, and critical that only the diverse skills of a team can be employed to solve it? If the answer is yes, then a sponsoring leader should not simply launch and forget the team but tether and nurture it to produce a true high-performance unit that develops coup d'oeil along the same lines as its individual members.

Leadership does not end with the formation of quality teams; it is the heart of quality teams. Bureaucrats who use

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team formation as a numerical metric have yet to appreciate that individual leadership and quality are—and always have been—one and the same. Throughout history, our greatest leaders implicitly appreciated the tenets of quality long before W. Edwards Deming or J. M. Juran made them explicit.

Yet, if bureaucrats and quality teams seem to work well in corporate America, why shouldn't they work in the Air Force? First, quality-based process action teams (PAT) and developmental teams are ideal in the USAF for *specific cross-functional problems* but should be employed as an exception—not as a rule. *Developing individual leadership in the work center for future use with these teams should be the rule.* Unlike an employee of Xerox Corporation, an officer or noncommissioned officer must hone his or her leadership skill and judgment, always with a focus on the battlefield. Though the team is historically a critical war-fighting element of battle, the leader is and always has been the focal point from which the team draws its power and intellect when the fog of war descends. In our passion for creating numerous quality teams, let us not forget that leadership is nurtured with the focus on combat. There is no acceptable parallel to the battlefield at Xerox; hence, corporate teams may perpetually work without consideration for nurturing the read-and-act skills needed to independently and quickly overcome the unknown factors that emerge when troops and materiel clash. We simply must not overuse or abuse teams to the point of creating impotent leaders unable to develop/nurture *coup d'oeil* in peace or employ it in war. When we either employ a team or are employed as members of a team, we must prevent such a problem by

1. continually striving to develop the inner light or *coup d'oeil* in ourselves and the people around us;
2. occasionally placing our subordinates in learning environments that demand complex decisions under difficult conditions;<sup>10</sup>

3. using quality as yet another intellectual springboard to attain wisdom on our lifetime journey to personal mastery and value-driven leadership; and

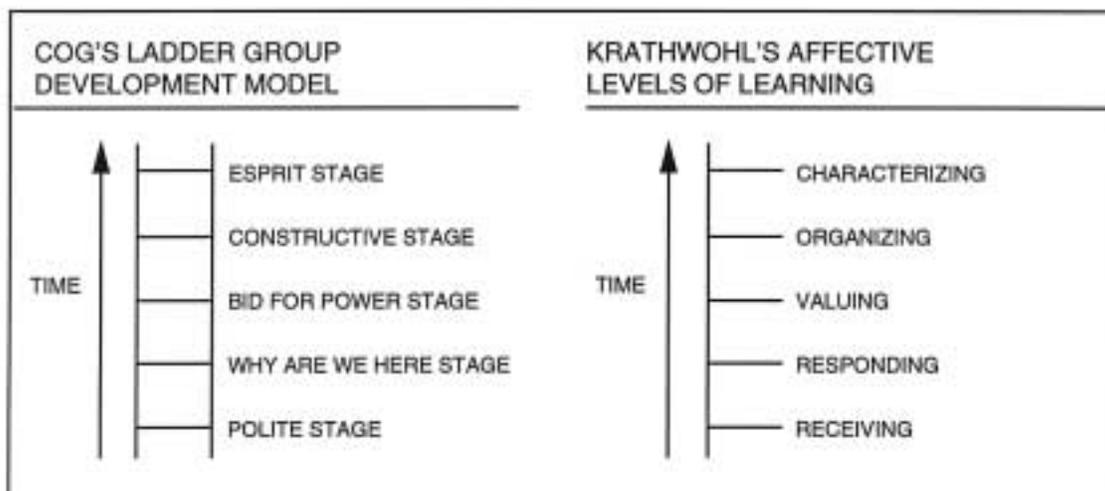
4. ensuring that our personnel understand their roles as teachers, learners, and leaders.

I do not make the indictment “pseudosynergy of everyday quality teams” without considerable deliberation. *The Team Handbook* defines a team simply as “a group of people pooling their skills, talents, and knowledge.”<sup>11</sup> (One should note that this quality-based definition totally ignores the role of the leader.) As members of a warrior-based culture, we should learn from our PME schools and expand this definition so that it reflects the attributes of truly high-performance teams by including

1. a leader with well-defined read-and-act skills (*coup d'oeil*);
2. dynamic followers who without hesitation aid the leader;
3. well-defined task and maintenance skills by all members of the team; and
4. a sense of purpose, unity, and camaraderie.<sup>12</sup>

If these elements are present, highly successful teams eventually emerge and begin exhibiting real synergy, whereby the output of the whole team exceeds that of the sum of the individual parts or individual members. The developmental and subsequent bonding process that successful teams go through in reaching synergy is described in the Cog's Ladder Group Development Model and is similar to the process each of us goes through to reach synergy with our own developing values, as reflected in Krathwohl's Affective Levels of Learning (fig. 31).

Though by no means equivalent, the two models share the understanding that both teams and individuals grow



**Figure 31. “Reaching Synergy” (from Squadron Officer School Curriculum [Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 1988], 3200 R-1 through R-4; and David P. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom, and Bertram B. Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* [White Plains, N.Y.: Longman Press, 1964], 37)**

experientially and in stages. Teams move through the stages of Cog's Ladder at their own speeds. Some operate effectively at the polite stage for years; others spiral up and down with feverish regularity. Despite this movement, the teams that remain at the top the longest demonstrate the effective and efficient results associated with synergy. A team's development, like an individual's, is dependent upon environment. Many leaders—including Col Russell V. Ritchey, the formulator and first commandant of Squadron Officer School—have found that effective combat teams mature best when they are nurtured in peacetime with a diet occasionally spiced with fear, frustration, and fatigue. Without these catalysts, teams will vacillate at the lower end of Cog's Ladder and never truly reach maturity or the team's equivalent of coup d'oeil. The fact that our quality teams do not mimic wartime conditions does not make them pseudosynergistic; however, the environment in which we place some of our teams is often counterproductive to the peacetime development of our future warriors. The following are just a few of the matters that teams must contend with as we attempt to overlay a corporate quality culture on a leadership culture that is evolving from the values of battle:

1. hiring facilitators to work team dynamic issues versus using team leaders who practice team dynamics based on their own implicit read-and-act skills;
2. using signed contracts/charters to ensure responsibilities versus using implicit contracts based on honor and communication;
3. managing by fact to ensure proper quantification and qualification of all data versus realizing that much data is unknown and that this fact forms the basis of the uncertainty of our own administrative battles;
4. requiring zero-defect potential for products versus using mistakes and risk taking as valuable lessons learned for the future;
5. holding expensive, week-long, off-site meetings to escape the pressures of the office versus enabling a leader to develop implicit "act" skills to use in any given situation;
6. insisting that customer expectations drive our processes versus ensuring that our documented processes contribute to enlightened customer expectations;
7. using demands exclusively focused on critical process identification versus placing equal—if not greater—importance on the infrastructures that must support and maintain the processes;
8. mandating the 10 quality tools and techniques for quality use versus teaching values and behaviors that enable practitioners to use any tools or techniques in their toolbox to get the job done;
9. insisting on statistically evaluated products versus employing processes with a basis in statistical thought; and
10. rigorously following corporate-based Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) models versus using more predictive

judgment-based hypothesis tools such as the Question, Theorize, Test, and Reflect learning model.<sup>13</sup>

We must fight as we train. The infusion of explicit, quality-based techniques into a leadership culture, however, may not enhance the way we want to fight. Our future leaders should be learning read-and-act skills as an art that allows them to apply all the above functions implicitly through leadership values instead of explicitly as scientific tasks or psychological tools. The first choice in each of the above 10 pairs of options is a constraint to aspiring value-based leaders and the war-fighting teams they are responsible for. The only winner is the military bureaucrat, who—untethered by long-term values—stymies the emerging risk takers in an environment increasingly void of coup d'oeil and ripe with short-term reward.

This trend is further clarified by Malham M. Wakin, who divides leaders into two basic types: (1) transactional (contract-based leadership "encouraging adversary relationships between the leader and those led") and (2) transformational (moral-based leadership "stressing the role of education, persuasion, and cooperation in mission accomplishment").<sup>14</sup> Perhaps a twentieth-century prophet, Wakin suggests that the "transformational leader sets the moral tone for his subordinates by the example of integrity he provides."<sup>15</sup> Integrity can't be instilled via contracts or charters. Yet, in quality we find these politically based concepts becoming the basis of all we do. Collectively, contracts, management by fact, zero-based defects, off-sites, and so forth seem to fly in the face of every attribute to which we need to expose future warriors. As a litmus test for quality, we should simply ask, Do the quality tools, techniques, or concepts being presented add to or detract from our institutional values on leadership? Some of these, such as imagineering, benchmarking, continuous improvement, self-assessments, and strategic planning may blend in beautifully with our values if they are integrated at the proper pace and time; others simply do not. A young lieutenant whose training focused exclusively on management by fact and zero-based defects may be ill prepared to solve a maintenance problem during a chemical bombardment with casualties mounting and airframes idled on the tarmac.

We are dangerously close to tolerating and—perhaps worse—sponsoring a generation of transactionalists instead of the transformationalists that an evolving fighting force needs. By not creating and rewarding transformational leaders in conjunction with our quality culture, we are slipping into a transactional, contract-based mind-set that, if given a foothold, will rob our future prophets and pugilists of the judgment they need to realize coup d'oeil, both in peace and war. Hopefully, the ultimate transformational leader is also the *synergist*, a term used by M. Lawrence Miller in his brilliant book, *Barbarians to Bureaucrats*. The synergist embodies but one of seven leadership styles, which—according to Miller—typically are found in most organizations. Because the Air Force

mirrors society, it too has its limited share of synergists, as well as the other six types:

1. **The Prophet:** The visionary who creates the breakthrough and the human energy to propel the [unit] forward.
2. **The Barbarian:** The leader of crisis and conquest who commands the [unit] on the march of rapid growth.
3. **The Builder and Explorer:** The developers of the specialized skills and structures required for growth, who shift from command to collaboration.
4. **The Administrator:** The creator of the integrating system and structure, who shifts the focus from expansion to security.
5. **The Bureaucrat:** The imposer of a tight grip of control, who crucifies and exiles new prophets and barbarians, assuring the loss of creativity and expansion.
6. **The Aristocrat:** The inheritor of wealth, alienated from those who do productive work, who is the cause of rebellion and disintegration.
7. **The Synergist:** The leader who maintains the balance, who continues the forward motion of a large and complex structure by unifying and appreciating the diverse contribution of the Prophet, Barbarian, Builder, Explorer, and Administrator.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, given its focus on quality and leadership, the USAF should strive to develop synergists who possess coup d'oeil and thus perform as transformational leaders. We need to teach our people to think in peace as we hope they will think in war. Organizations learn and evolve, as do individuals—only slower. This process doesn't necessarily require the lock-step implementation of quality tools and techniques previously noted; it simply requires value-based leadership.

This type of leadership is rooted in what Stephen Covey calls the natural laws that show us "true north."<sup>17</sup> A return to value-based leadership must be the first step in our quality journey and our development of coup d'oeil. In search of these natural laws, I embarked on a philosophical journey based primarily on the concept of profound knowledge articulated by Deming and Barbara Lawton, whose basic construct of "profound knowledge" includes

1. Application of psychology (motivation) in the workplace.
2. Appreciation of systems and processes.
3. Understanding of variation within processes (common and special causes).
4. Understanding the theory of knowledge (developing hypothesis-based thought).<sup>18</sup>

Though brilliant, this construct lacks any explicit reference to leadership or environment. Alternatively, I offer a parallel construct, wherein profound knowledge is an art whose evolution occurs along three convergent veins symbolized by the acronym ASK:

1. **arête:** Greek word loosely translated as duty to oneself (i.e., turning a philosophical vision into action through personal leadership).<sup>19</sup>
2. **systems thought:** Essence of Deming's message on systems/processes and the variation associated with each.<sup>20</sup>
3. **kaizen:** Japanese term meaning "gradual improvement in the status quo. . . . Everything in life deserves to be improved."<sup>21</sup>

Profound knowledge doesn't just happen, nor is it quickly taught. It evolves over time, as does any value. Simply put, value-based profound knowledge is a desire for gradual improvement, focused on systems and the variations within them and motivated by a commitment through personal leadership to turn a quality vision into action.

Though Lawton and Deming's construct of profound knowledge differs from my own, this type of knowledge—once nurtured—feeds the synergist and becomes the moral springboard for the lifetime transformationalist.

By mixing quality-based, value-centered leadership with a lifetime commitment to profound knowledge, one successfully builds quality into organizations and restores synergy to both quality teams and individuals while developing coup d'oeil in transformational leaders. *Arête* is the primary pathway by which knowledge and values intertwine and then mesh with a warrior's evolution to developing the inner eye or coup d'oeil. Most appropriately, the *arête* cycle (fig. 32) ends with a clear and observable change in behavior.<sup>22</sup>

If one seeks leadership, coup d'oeil, and potential war-fighting teams, one must become the synergist and develop or allow the development of processes that support *arête* and coup d'oeil in peace. Our profession is too important to be caught up in an increasingly narrow quality vision without thought or consideration for its wartime impact on our emerging leaders.

Deming succinctly states that "quality cannot be shouted!"<sup>23</sup> Yet, the Air Force is currently screaming quality as if it has unearthed the Holy Grail. As a value, quality is simply an awareness that grows from a gradual change in the way we see ourselves and the world around us. For a war-fighting force, quality must have deeper meaning than a preapproved, scientific listing of specific tools, techniques, or methodologies (training-based curricula) that are to be blindly used in accordance with some requirement without engaging the guiding intellect (education-based curricula) that should truly define our culture. If the prophet properly employs his vision, the pugilist can employ his weapon system with a natural synergy that is the essence of quality. If this artistic synergy is obstructed by the politician, we become slaves to quality, entrapping ourselves and absolving ourselves of the very judgment the quality culture is trying to nurture. *As a value, quality fits beautifully into our lifetime pursuit of intellect and coup d'oeil as outlined by Clausewitz.* Used alone as a tool, it becomes an isolated cancer that erodes coup d'oeil and increases pseudosynergistic teams which defy our intellect and feed only the bureaucrats. Regardless, quality is here to stay; we must now simply implement it in

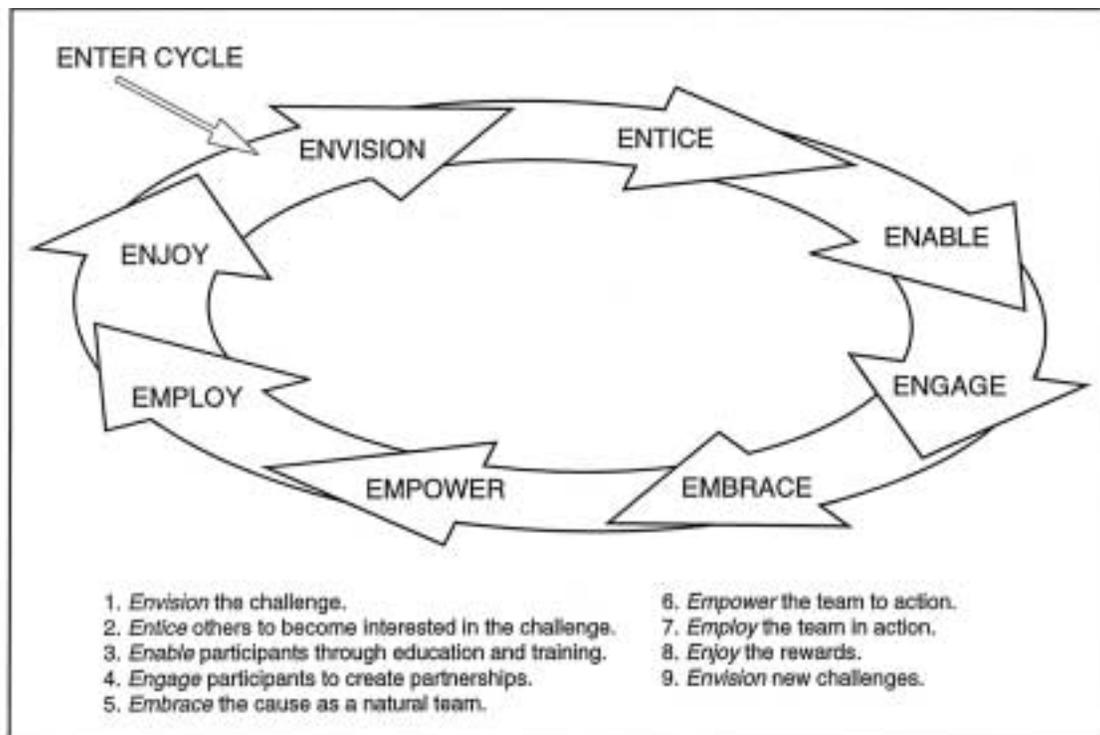


Figure 32. Pathway of Arête

harmony with the other leadership values unique to our profession. It is my hope that the quality philosophy succeeds tenfold and in the process creates a generation of exceptionally wise leaders. The springboard to our institutional transformation lies in education and in the subsequent development of value-based synergists from the prophets, pugilists, builders, explorers, and administrators who currently fill positions in our organizations. With these leaders instructed on value-based profound knowledge (in whatever form) and learned in the art of coup d'oeil, we have an opportunity to dramatically transform not only government, but war fighting for generations to come. If, however, we take the road of the shortsighted military bureaucrat, we are doomed, for "only the dead have seen the end of the war."<sup>24</sup>

### Notes

1. Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1990), 37.
2. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 102.
3. The read-and-act skills model was developed by Dr. Gus Economos, who suggests that great leaders need to be able to properly read situations and people and then act by using the appropriate methods and resources.
4. Gen Douglas MacArthur, "Duty, Honor, Country," in AU-24, *Concepts for Air Force Leadership*, ed. Richard I. Lester and A. Glenn Morton (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, 1990), 370.
5. Ira C. Eaker, "Anatomy of Leadership: Images and Reflections—The Pattern of Air Leadership," in AU-24, *Concepts of Air Force Leadership*, ed. Richard I. Lester and A. Glenn Morton (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press) 1990, 317.
6. Clausewitz, 101.

7. *Ibid.*, 102.
8. Michael Howard, *Clausewitz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 27.
9. Clausewitz, 102.
10. Russell V. Ritchey, *Year of the Tiger* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 1974), 67.
11. Peter Scholtes et al., *The Team Handbook: How to Use Teams to Improve Quality* (Madison, Wis.: Joiner Associates, 1988), 2–7.
12. *Squadron Officer School Curriculum* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 1987), 3130 R-1 through R-2 and 3160 R-1 through R-2.
13. Ronnie Lessem, *Total Quality Learning: Building a Learning Organization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1991), 27.
14. Malham M. Wakin, "The Ethics of Leadership II," in AU-24, *Concepts of Air Force Leadership*, ed. Richard I. Lester and A. Glenn Morton (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press) 1990, 55.
15. *Ibid.*, 59.
16. M. Lawrence Miller, *Barbarians to Bureaucrats: Corporate Life Cycle Strategies: Lessons from the Rise and Fall of Civilizations* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1989), 2.
17. Stephen R. Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), 140.
18. W. Edwards Deming, *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 50.
19. Lessem, 6–7.
20. Deming, 98–103.
21. Masaaki Imai, *Kaizen: The Key to Japan's Competitive Success* (New York: Random House Business Division, 1986), 3–7.
22. Charles T. Barco, "Search for Profound Knowledge," in *QAF Symposium Proceedings* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 1993), 729. The *arête* pathway was designed to be used with a judgment/hypothesis-based learning cycle such as Lessem's Question, Theorize, Test, and Reflect model. Lessem, 27.
23. Quoted in Federal Quality Institute, *TQM in the Federal Government* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), iii.
24. Plato, quoted in MacArthur, 372.