

Leadership as a Function of Experience

Gen Bryce Poe II

During my years of active service I read military history and biographies extensively with a view of learning more about what made a successful commander, what were the secrets of leadership. I still do, for the subject is both fascinating and rewarding, whether Napoléon's words on the "Coup d'oeil militaire . . . inborn in great generals" or the most recent text of Royal Air Force action in the Falklands.

During the same time, however, I was privileged to be a commander at every rank but second lieutenant and brigadier. I learned that the lessons of history, while invaluable in many ways, left many relatively mundane and commonplace problems unanswered.

Closer attention to the classical military writings indicated that such was not always the case. We read Sun Tzu Wu for advice every bit as useful today as when written in 500 B.C.—"Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt;" or quote him to the Congress, "rely not on the likelihood of the enemy's not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable." To find these comments, however, we must turn through many pages of practical advice on not trying to cross rivers "flecked with foam" or to mark "rising of birds in flight" as a sign of an ambush. Jomini's *Art of War* not only gives good counsel on such diverse major subjects as tactics, strategy, logistics, and relations with the civil government but also advice on coping with daily activities such as how to track "Temporary Duty" detachments, manage transportation, organize repair shops, and the like.

I sometimes feel that we are a bit embarrassed to equate "leadership" with the routine, the matter of course, the customary. This is a pity, since it is by a commander's performance in such matters that he is most often judged by both superiors and subordinates. More important, such actions often form the baseline for the training, planning, and execution necessary for success in mission-critical activity.

Without taking anything at all from the many writings on the overall subject of leadership, it might be useful to spend a few pages on a potpourri of the practical, often almost

mechanical, things that a commander can do—or refrain from doing—to make his organization more efficient, actually more lethal, in the accomplishment of the mission.

The first thing he can do is expose himself and his people to the experience, the wisdom, available. It might come from the written record just mentioned or from the expletive deleted comments of a frustrated crew chief, but solutions to most problems are readily at hand. Most things have been tried before—you can learn why they worked or did not work. That they failed before may not be reason for not trying again, but you can do so from a position of knowledge.

Unlike many around the world, our society is reluctant to accept the advice of elders. That is our loss. When commander, Air Force Logistics Command (AFLC), I was fortunate to have Generals Ira C. Eaker and William F. McKee as advisors at my commanders' conferences. Just before one such meeting a young colonel said, "It is certainly thoughtful of you to ask those two gentlemen to sit in—I know life must be sort of dull for them and that they appreciate it." I said, "See me later and let me know what you think." After the meeting he came in, wide-eyed, and said, "They really had some good advice!"

Of course they did—our problems with the budget, with support of allies, with combat readiness, were all examined by two experts on the basis of experience from the *Question Mark* to Yalta, from dealings with dozens of presidents, prime ministers, secretaries, and congressional committee chairmen to lessons learned as successful commanders, authors, and businessmen.

It is just as foolish to ignore the immensely valuable fund of information from juniors, either in age or rank. Bacon said, "You cannot do things that have never been done except in ways that have been never tried." The young, the inexperienced, often approach a problem without the preconceived notions or bias that restrict real examination of alternatives. As for rank—whether Roman centurion, frontier cavalry colonel, or modern day wing commander—what successful senior officer has not asked for and relied on the advice of the key noncommissioned officers (NCO) of his organization on a daily basis.

Our allies provide another rich lore of practical experience. Some have had to substitute technology, tactical skill, training innovations, for numbers and have much to offer in that way. Others, in particular those with smaller forces, have had to "make do" in ways that are particularly attrac-

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tive to us as we deal with budget cuts. Finally, each is the real expert in its part of the world.

I spent many years overseas, and never served with another air force that I didn't learn a great deal to my profit in later years—runway snow removal in Norway; tool control from the Danes to reduce foreign object damage (FOD); target designation in the jungle in Malaysia; air base defenses from the Royal Air Force (RAF); fighter quick-turn at Luftwaffe stations; and so forth. From some friends, like those in Indonesia and Egypt, I not only learned to do some things but how not to treat your allies, as they told me of their difficulties in working with the Soviet airmen that preceded me.

So remember that good advice is where you find it, and you find it almost anywhere you look. The same goes for example.

Of course in both cases there is another side to consider and be wary of. You will find some outfits replete with people who will—with every good intention—lead you down the garden path. Ensuring justice, in everything from signing charge sheets to preparing duty rosters, requires that you analyze very carefully any advice you receive.

In Europe we had what I considered a reasonable rule about what happened to those guilty of driving while intoxicated (DWI). It was that you didn't drive on station for the following year. For some time it seemed to me that every officer that was caught DWI had a house full of kids and a wife who couldn't drive—furthermore, it was made clear that we couldn't go to war without him behind the wheel of his auto. My response. "Give him his license back at DEFCON 5," as considered heartless—but demonstrated to all ranks that justice had to be prompt, predictable, and evenhanded.

I very much admired one of our commanders who, found to be DWI after a minor accident, raised rather than lowered his credibility. He asked no favors but instead bought a moped (which required no license) and used it instead of his staff car, an action not lost on his subordinates.

When a medical officer was caught using and selling controlled substances, three separate delegations with impressive credentials came overseas to try and talk us out of taking courts-martial action. When we asked why this man should not be held to the same standards as a young airman—really much higher because of his responsibilities—the answer was, "But he has so much greater potential!" For all we knew, the young airman in trouble could be a potential Edison or Einstein. Of course we stood fast.

Then there is the individual—with an example prominent in the news these days—found in nearly every organization who says, "I know what you want done, just don't ask me too many questions and I'll take care of it." When I was a young officer that was a way of life; each outfit had its scrounger, its experts in "moonlight requisitions," or its specialist in taking some recalcitrant out behind the barracks and explaining the facts of life. No more. If you hear that—or even sense it—say, "Sit down and tell me exactly what you intend to do." You will not only save yourself a lot of trouble but may actu-

ally preserve the career of a good man, since many such people really are basically smart, loyal, and energetic.

I mentioned justice as regards such mundane things as duty rosters. You will never be considered a leader by your people, especially the more junior ones, if you allow abuse in such matters. It requires some perception and close attention on your part. For example, a wing in Spain had a continuous alert commitment in Turkey. When we began to have maintenance and support problems there we found that the TDY burden was being carried by two- and three-striper. For the most part, senior NCOs would go on one or two TDY tours and then, all the souvenirs bought and sight-seeing done, would opt out for the rest of their three-year tour. Accordingly, some young airmen were spending almost two years TDY at a remote base during the same three-year period. It was unfair; it was also hurting readiness.

And it was often the most conscientious NCO, one who took more than his own share of TDY, who did his friends the favor when it came time to pick who was to go.

Often such problems arise from the perception as to what is "fair" rather than what is important to the mission. I remember the wing in West Germany that was close to failing an operational readiness inspection (ORI) because aircraft were down for hydraulic problems due to a shortage of hydraulic specialists. I found two such specialists on duty as security police augmentees at the same time that some administrative people had so little to do they were playing cards. The problem? It was considered "fair" that each organization contribute X percent of their people to be augmentees, instead of leaving critical flightline skills along and emptying some essentially peacetime offices.

Perception can be a real problem in other ways. You need to recognize it as often every bit as serious to a commander as reality. The example comes to mind of the commander who assured the visiting inspector general (IG) that the rumor that a particular minority group had grievances was just that, a rumor. He had a briefing that showed their promotion rate as above average, ethnic tradition and tastes were being attended to, had had an "open door" for complainants, and "they really have no problems." The IG replied, "Yes, but they burned your X\$#@& mess hall down!" To the group concerned the problems were real indeed.

That commander's problem is shared by many, by all those who never get out of the office. For example, what does "open door" mean to the two-striper? It means explaining to his section chief why he needs time off, getting a haircut, shining his shoes and his brass, seeing a first sergeant who he hopes had forgotten him, all en route to a session with a squadron commander he has never met and doubts he can trust. That commander should have learned the two-striper's problem when visiting his section on the job.

Get out of your office and through the various parts of the headquarters, and especially "show the flag" on the line, in the shops, wherever your people are—and on all the shifts and in all the remote places where they work! Yours will never be a home-station, eight-to-five job. Most people want

to have a look at the new commander, even better, hear what he has to say—even a few words.

As you make your rounds, note how you are received—professionally, courteously, lackadaisically, perhaps not at all, ignored. Remember that other visitors to your outfit, not to omit such as the IG, General Accounting Office (GAO), or higher headquarters, may get the same reception. Some of the most talented people you have will find it almost impossible to talk to visitors, especially those who are high ranking. One system that helped me as a wing commander was to train the top two or three people in each shop or office to greet visitors with their name and five items. “My name is _____; I am the _____ of the shop; we have _____ people authorized and _____ assigned. We rebuild _____ per week; if you will follow me I will show you around.” Once he gets through this he will usually decide that he can talk to the visitor without turning into a pumpkin and do alright from then on. It all worked very well except for “if you will follow me.” They always seem to stand aside for the senior, who of course has no idea where to go.

It is especially important to get out at night and visit TDY posts. During a two-year period I spent over 250 days TDY, mostly “kicking over toolboxes” at night. While I asked the questions that concerned me, about quality, use of tech data, safety, security, and other issues; what were the questions they asked me? Why: “sour milk in the commissary, no bench stock, my wife turned away from hospital emergency, no pay, batteries only last one or two flights . . .” “Have you told anyone else about this?” “Yes sir, I’ve been talking about it for a long time.” Of course he has, he’s been talking about it to his friends on the night shift and they all wonder why the commander lets this sort of thing go on.

Remember, most flightline and shop supervision is on hand from 0800 to 1700, most maintenance work is done from 1500 to midnight or beyond. Get out there at night unannounced, and you’ll see all manner of amazing things—what you won’t see is all that many stripes and bars and leaves. And whatever you fix won’t stay fixed! I remember telling a wing commander, “Only in avionics have you proper, around the clock, supervision.” I went back a month later and all was up tight, but two months after that I had to tell him again, “Only in avionics do you have proper, around the clock, supervision.”

The idea is that, “I have 20 years in and it’s only right that I can run the bowling league (be a scoutmaster, umpire at little league, play poker, square dance. . .) in the evenings.” Not so, if the people and mission are active at night, so must be supervision. The only way in the world for a commander to check that is to go out and look, personally and often!

The mission is top priority to you as a commander, but you must remember that is not true for everyone. So long as they do the job I find no fault with that but you must remember it. Remember, for example, that families are rightfully the first concern of your married people, and that those family members are subject to many more problems and give a lot more than their counterparts in civilian life. Recognize

that and recognize them—a rose to a man’s wife when you mark his promotion or decoration may seem a little thing, but it shows you know her important contribution to his success.

As you move around and see and meet people remember the way things work. It used to really irritate me when we’d come across some slovenly or discourteous individual and the commander who was with me would put on a little show: “Name, rank, serial number, report to my office at . . .!” What he should have done is noted the name on the name tag and asked just one question: “Who do you work for?” That supervisor has, by commission or example “authorized” that man to look and act that way—or perhaps he has not even seen him to know if the culprit is on TDY or the night shift. Who then deserves the commander’s attention?

To make your trips out into the organization effective, you need to do some study and learn some basic procedures. No one expects you to know things in detail, but it keeps them on their toes when your knowledge is obviously not superficial. Some interesting exchanges come to mind: “Chief, why isn’t this lightall grounded?” “It is sir, right there.” “That’s a start, chief, but unless I’m wrong you need three and that’s only one.” “I thought you folks in the engine shop were helping me save money?” “We sure work at it, sir.” “Then why does this daily document register show that you bought these items this morning and turned them in for no credit this afternoon?” And, “I thought that other than the gun any munitions load operation required a nonworking crew chief?” I worked hard at this, trying to get some specific skills in a few key areas, but still felt I never got my “snow factor” under about 50 percent. If you **don’t** work at it you’ll never have any idea as to what is really going on.

And there are some other advantages to working at it. If you check an item in some detail once, the word will quickly get around and you can go on to other things, at least for a little while.

Take a look at how your subordinate commanders operate. If they seem to be tied to their offices, you may need to use some mechanical device to get them out where they can learn what is going on. At a time when we had serious supply problems, all the way from aircraft support to discipline, we found most wing commanders never visited supply facilities or barracks. Soon after we decreed a monthly “window on the wing supply” briefing, **given at the supply squadron**, all sorts of good things began to happen.

The wing commanders involved had fallen into a typical trap, that of working on what they were good at and liked to do instead of what they should do. Flying operations are the mission every part of the wing supports, but when the commander, who has capable full colonels as vice commander, Deputy Commander for Operation (DCO), and ADCO, plus handpicked field grade officers as flying squadron commander, stan eval, instructor pilots (IP) etc., spends all his time on monitoring weather aborts and cross-country planning while he has a captain in a lieutenant colonel’s job as commander of a support squadron that is in trouble, he needs to have his priorities reexamined.

Always work to make certain that unit pride does not discriminate—that it applies to the entire unit. “I may be a clerk but I’m a clerk in the . . . Tac Fighter Squadron.” My first command was an overseas additional duty command of a rehabilitation unit for delinquents—everything from absence without leave to thieves and thugs. We worked hard and looked surprisingly good as we went about our drill and other training. Years later, halfway around the world, I met one of my trainees who proudly told his wife, “I used to be in the captain’s outfit in Japan.” If it would work for that unit it should work anywhere.

Get your historian into the act. History convinces more people than does philosophy. Your unit may have helped Pershing chase Villa, been to Schweinfurt, fought on the Yalu or over Route Pack Six. Time passes quickly and youngsters can’t know these things unless they are told.

If you talk to people they will talk to you. A commander is busy, burdened, and understandably not prone to suffer fools. Nevertheless, he *must* do so. Let’s say you’re asked the most stupid question on record and sarcastically respond. That man may be stupid but he lives and works with people. You can easily forecast a scenario where someone tells him: “Jim’s pushing drugs and using my shop locker to store them and says he’ll cut me up if I do anything about it.” “Well, whatever you do, don’t go to the old man—I had a real problem and he chewed me up and threw me out!”

The way perception comes about doesn’t always even require a word. The commander who lets a racist or sexist joke or slur made in his presence go unchallenged has lost his credibility. You needn’t shoot the culprit, or make a big thing of it, just words like “I don’t find that in any way funny,” will make your point quite clear and that word will get around. You may not be able to change how people think, but you are then on the road to change how they act, which in that circumstance is exactly your job.

Don’t jump to conclusions when judging people or organizations. Take time to learn what is really going on—sometimes that isn’t easy.

I remember the case of a security police squadron with persistent rumors of racial discrimination by some officers and NCOs in the award of Article 15s. An investigating officer conducted an agonizingly detailed study of records and interviewed everyone concerned. His determination was that all was fair since those punished all agreed they had done what they were disciplined for. We sent him back to ask how many of what kind of people had committed the same infractions and learned that if you were black you read about it and if you were not you were told not to do it again!

In another case a snap decision was made by a general officer to summarily fire a very senior base commander. He was responding to poor information given him by visitors who mistook the blunt and rather impolitic manner of the man for racial prejudice. It turned out that he was one of the strongest supporters of the equal opportunity program. Several thousand people assembled to object to the firing and I went in and interviewed many. Comments included:

“He had me for Thanksgiving dinner in his home, how many black airmen were in your home that day, general?” and, from an old friend and chief master sergeant, “Those @\$% came in here and fired the best friend the black man has.” Of course, by that time we had to deal with not just rumor and gossip but newspaper headlines. Five minutes on the telephone with the wing commander, to ask the question: “What in the world did colonel X say today and what kind of a man is he?” would have saved all manner of grief for all concerned, including the commander in chief (CINC) who had personally to get involved.

The old order “I want that man off the base by sundown” is foolish in the extreme. You may find it necessary to relieve someone on very short notice but don’t overcommunicate until you know what is going on.

The most difficult task you’ll have in evaluating people will not be the bad ones but the good ones. When I was a junior officer we had quite a few really bad actors, lazy, disinterested, undisciplined, and they had skills to match—little in the way of education, technical know-how, air or ground abilities. Today things are almost too good. In later years my toughest job was to sit on selection boards. The typical scene was where—with say 2,000 people to look at—two or three popped out the top with extraordinary achievements and perhaps a dozen more fell out the bottom with records that made you wonder why we still kept them. You were left with more than 1,900 any of whom could have served well at the higher rank, done well at the school, or whatever.

Much thought has been given to a new officer effectiveness report (OER) system—I hope it helps. The old system suffered from several problems but it was hard to criticize when you had no better idea. Whatever the system, I offer two thoughts. First, because most OERs are written on the activity of the last three months of the reporting year, the most significant accomplishments could well be forgotten. It takes some digging to prepare a proper evaluation. Second, most people write too much—perhaps the best endorsement I ever saw read: “This major is the best ops officer I have, and I have some crackerjack lieutenants doing the same job.”

While we’re at it, it’s not only with OERs that we write too much. It’s a way of life. One time I saw an order for a missile launch that covered 150 pages. One annex of 20 pages dealt with public affairs—“If the missile fails to launch we say . . . ; if it explodes in sight we say . . . ; if it destructs downrange we say . . . ; if it hits the target we say” Of course the missile didn’t accommodate and did something unforecast. I couldn’t help but compare this with Sherman’s march from Atlanta to the sea and then north, moving a modern army of 68,000 men through the heart of an enemy country for six months by means of a three-page order that never changed. He also had a nine-man staff, but perhaps we had best skip that.

The first time you meet with a new staff you are really on trial. That meeting should be carefully prepared and limited in time. No more than half an hour that may have taken you several hours to prepare. The main points should be clear and

what is important to you and, in particular, your priorities should be emphasized.

Incidentally, those first meetings with your staff can give you some useful clues. You have, for example, worked hard to prepare and as you talk you see that only two or three people are taking notes. You can be certain that, within a few days, each of the others will demonstrate, by omission or commission, that they have not remembered what you said.

This is a common failing; few people seem to understand that “the weakest ink is stronger than the strongest memory.” You need to get them in the habit of writing things down, tell them to, give them a pencil if they haven’t one. And how did I learn this—my first military boss was a World War I veteran master sergeant. When I reported in to him he gave me a dime and said: “Poe, go over and buy one of them little pocket notebooks, cause I never intend to tell you nuthin’ twict!”

We not only write too much when we don’t need to and not at all when we should, we really write very poorly. It may be that as we gain technical excellence we lose the ability to tell people what we want and need. Worse yet, there is a cadre of staff officers who have great skill in writing with so much jargon and gobbledegook that they can never be pinned down, never committed. That is as unconscionable as it is common. We are in the wrong business to be obtuse, oblique, vague, or undecisive. If Lee had written a little more clearly to Longstreet, he might not have had three such bad days at Gettysburg.

Insist that what you sign be as brief and to the point as possible and crystal clear. At one time I became so frustrated that I began announcing a “secret word” at staff meetings, words I never wanted to see again (utilize, penultimate, author [as a verb], macro, synergism, and all the rest). Some time later one of my brigadiers wryly remarked that since he left the Pentagon and joined me he had lost half his vocabulary and no one in his old office could understand his letters.

You don’t have to put up with that nonsense. If you won’t sign it they will learn to write properly.

Nothing is more frustrating than to learn that something you have been told is not true. However, that does not always call for the conclusion you have been lied to. The US Air Force is made up for the most part of honest, conscientious people. They are also usually very hard working and busy. At Tan Son Nhut, with the 50,000-plus landings and takeoffs per month, we felt it prudent that each squadron commander visit wheel watch at the end of the runway at least once a month just to keep in mind the scale of the problem. When I asked if everyone had done that, all said, “Yes.” When I checked the book at runway control most had not. They thought they had but had been so busy that 10 weeks instead of four had passed since their last visit. No one lied, they just needed to be jacked up for not doing as told.

Often you have to introduce people in your own organization. I can remember asking a commander why he had not dispersed his aircraft even though I saw stacks of pierced steel planking (PSP) on hand. He advised that it was used material and had arrived without the steel rods needed to

assemble it. I took him to his machine shop, showed a rod to the shop chief and asked if he could make them. His reply, “Faster than you can pick them up off the floor.”

It is always a problem to get people to use the talent in a unit. Standard evaluation and quality control are excellent examples, as in the case of an avionics shop that got a fine score during an inspection and decided to go for “Best in the Command.” They cleared the place, reworked the floor, walls, repainted equipment, put everything back, and waited with great pride for the next IG inspection. “Unsatisfactory!” Grounds had been painted over and safety boards and warning signs not reposted. Heartbreaking, but easily avoided by a call to quality control (QC) saying, “We’ve finished our rehab, how about coming over and giving us a shakedown?”

Some commanders are prone to strong and public display of irritation or temper. Though there are all too many circumstances that may tempt you, and all of us have probably been guilty, I would suggest that the only time to display temper is when it is essentially theater—carefully planned and thought out. I once saw an example in a multinational headquarters, where the commander and his vice carefully orchestrated his “exploding” and staking out of a staff meeting, followed by his vice saying, “Don’t be too hard on . . . , these problems of delayed national approval of our actions to meet the new threat are really getting to him.”

This time it worked, but it’s not easy and when temper and sarcasm become standard you are in real trouble. I can remember, during the Cuban missile crisis, two major generals arguing about the direction just given them—“He said” “I know he said that but he must have meant. . . .” I felt like shouting, “please go back in and find out,” but they had been so often abused and ridiculed that they never even considered volunteering for more of the same. The commander had put himself in a dreadful position.

When otherwise capable people suddenly have problems you may need to look into it yourself. This is particularly true if their supervisors are technicians or specialists rather than commanders. I was asked to sign an Article 15 for a major who had been a top performer but had recently often been late to work. “Just sign here, general.” I refused until I had talked to him—a process I highly recommend whenever possible. I asked what he had to say and he said, “Nothing, it’s all true.” I said, “Do you have a drinking problem?” and it all came out—wife left him, elderly parents uncared for in the states, couldn’t pass the bar in the lobby of his billet. We confirmed his problems, helped with them legally and got him into a program that successfully dried him out. He went on to be one of our best support squadron commanders. The problem was not only his but that of the two full colonels up the chain who did not have the wit to work the problem other than superficially, didn’t know to ask the first logical question when someone changes so radically.

There is another side to that. Remember that you are in a business with no second place winners, no silver or bronze medals. If you have done what is reasonably possible to salvage someone and he does not, or cannot, respond, then he

has to go. It can be done discreetly, with compassion, but must be done. We can no longer carry such people, and that includes friends, classmates, relatives, war buddies, or any other category of personal association. And do it yourself, don't pass the buck to someone else to be your hatchet man.

This business of the necessity for a leader's being accessible is not confined to squadron level. If anything it becomes ever more difficult as you move up the ladder. People know how busy you are, the long hours you work, the problems distractions cause, and they loyally try to protect you. They often do you no favor. Some of the most loyal and also the most guilty are the carefully selected colonels and executive secretaries in your outer office. They can insulate you so thoroughly that you can't do your job, and worse yet they are so good at it you don't know it's happening.

One way to reduce the possibilities of this is rarely, if ever, to move key staff people with you on changes of assignment. Unless you are establishing an entirely new organization, this instantly results in a "them and us" perception on both sides, one of the worst things for a new commander. Talk to your predecessor about the staff, make changes if you like but from within if at all possible. Later, if you have a special problem that needs solving by bringing in someone with known ability, that's fine, but to arrive with an entourage will usually hurt much more than it helps.

This brings to mind the subject of general officers' aides. If there is an undeserved poor perception, it is the one that many otherwise bright people have of aides. The job is critically important, and I used to search Air Force-wide for the right person. I then tried, however, to keep them in the job little more than a year. There are several reasons for this—first, don't tar him with the title of "horse holder." Also, the job is unique in its opportunity to learn, and that opportunity should be offered to as many young officers of high potential as possible.

You will be tested at each new station and by each new staff or command. People will deliberately try to determine how firm or easy you will be, how fair or unfair, how distant or remote. Don't ever forget, "first impressions" are very real for commanders, and while bad ones are hard—almost impossible—to erase, good ones are, in contrast, very fragile and easily destroyed.

Don't forget your subordinates who are tenants with other commands. Often they have extremely sensitive and important missions that are not very high on the landlord's priority list. One technique is to require a monthly letter report directly from your commander to you. Then he can go in and say, "I really have to have that security fencing and lighting brought back up to standard before the 10th, when I send my monthly letter to the old man. If I report it still out, he'll be right out here and neither of us needs that!" Seemed to work nearly every time.

Decision making is almost continuous. It can range from the instantaneous reaction to "break left!" in your headset to the acceptance of a plan that has taken weeks to prepare. It is often difficult, but a simple, old-time procedure, called

the Five Paragraph Field Order, helps address almost any circumstance.

- Paragraph 1—**Statement of the Problem.** (When someone is wrestling with a decision, ask him to state the problem. This is often eye opening.)
- Paragraph 2—**Assumptions.** (Most point papers mix assumptions and facts too readily.)
- Paragraph 3—**Facts Bearing on the Problem.** (Look carefully to be certain that you are not given the facts bearing only on one side of the problem, that favoring the author's desired conclusions.)
- Paragraph 4—**Conclusions.**
- Paragraph 5—**Recommendations.** (Do they track with the conclusions?)

This is a mechanical device, found in Army manuals for over a hundred years, that still is very useful.

It is also useful when you have one of those seniors who gives you a problem to solve, together with the conclusions and recommendations he desires. You work the problem, and then are able to go in and say: "If this is the problem, and these are the correct assumptions, then these facts that I have collected do not support what was anticipated. Rather, these are the conclusions and recommendations that result."

Some decisions need to be made in an instant, most do not. This is particularly true when something completely unforeseen occurs, and people come running in waving their arms and insisting on immediate action by you, the commander. A typical example is the aircraft stuck in the mud off the side of the runway. If alternates are available to recover other aircraft and alert reactions are not impaired, you have all the time in the world to get that plane out. All too often, panic reigns and what is initially only an incident turns into a major accident when the wrong people with the wrong equipment tear the gear off in the process.

You not only have an accident, but the knowledgeable officers and NCOs wonder how well you would handle a *real* crisis—such as an enemy attack!

At a time like that, you should know your priorities. While a wing commander overseas giving a tour to the USAF chief of staff, I had a call on my car radio that one of my RF-4Cs was inbound with a serious emergency. I suppose the "cool" reaction might have been to reply, "OK, take care of it and let me know." My priorities were clear, and my reaction was, "General Ryan, I'm afraid I have to leave you here, my vice commander will continue the tour." The chief had his priorities too; he said, "How about my coming along, I'll stay out of the way." We both observed a happy ending.

Remember that the more senior you are, the less people are inclined to forgive you for errors or discrepancies. It has been said that a colonel's amusing eccentricity is a general officer's major character defect.

This is becoming more true every day as the media and entertainment industry portray military leaders—officer and NCO—as buffoons, martinets, cowards, zealots, or any of many other uncomplimentary types. There are no longer

honest errors, only conspiracies, and anyone in a position of responsibility is automatically marked as irresponsible.

I wouldn't lose any sleep over all this, but neither would I give them any ammunition to use against us. Write as if for the front page of the *Washington Post*; speak as though it will be broadcast on the 7 A.M. television news.

The modern counterparts of "feed the horses, then the men, and last of all the officers" are very much in order. As we have moved to the larger, more sophisticated, less personal military organizations, much of this attitude has been lost. For too many, rank is confused with "perks" and privilege. Leadership requires a visible demonstration that you do not consider yourself a privileged character.

Even when you work at that, you will find people think you have privileges you do not have. Again, don't spend time worrying about it but don't feed the fire with thoughtless actions. Ostentatious use of staff cars (sometimes actually in violation of public law, such as most domicile to duty travel), fancy offices with plush carpets, elaborate official social activities and the like do not inspire confidence in juniors, seniors, or the taxpayers. There is no reason not to be comfortable, neat, clean, and attractive, but excess is too often apparent.

And this can impact the mission. I remember one occasion when "innovative" partitioning of funding to keep under the legal ceiling had been used to build a facility in which to meet visiting contractors. This was discovered in the height of our desperate effort to keep the B-1 bomber in the budget and did nothing to help our fiscal credibility. I was furious, and when I complained was given the excuse that "we can't use those old shabby rooms to have discussions with contractors, you should see where we work at their installations." The answer of course was that it would probably do both our people and the contractors good to work in the midst of evidence that we were saving our money to increase readiness.

An overly simple but intriguing motto for the commander might be, "If it doesn't contribute to putting the bombs down or the missiles up, don't do it!"

Remember that **credit to your subordinates is credit to you**. The small benefit gained by claiming recognition for something someone else does—or blaming a subordinate for an error that was your responsibility—is greatly outweighed by the justifiable loss of confidence and respect by your people. Those kinds of actions will not only always become known, they will be embellished and become larger than life. Such behavior seems endemic in some staffs. It is bad enough there, but intolerable in the field. As a commander, you must be alert to this, not do it yourself and not allow it in others.

The opposite, giving the junior the chance to brief his project, lead his project team, take the public bows, pays dividends over and over. It also results in much better prepared and presented material.

This should be remembered as paperwork moves up the line. If each level above the action officer picks at it and rewrites, you often get a product that is so watered down and compromised it is worthless. One system that worked for me

was insisting that the action officer's original come to my desk. Intermediate levels could make any comments they desired, preferably marginally, and then if it were to go out of the command we'd retype it after my changes. This has great advantages. The action officer, once trained to give it only a "lick and a promise" because "the old so-and-so is going to rewrite it anyway so be my guest" now is really precise about what he does, and a great deal of typing and retyping and paper-passing time is saved.

You should stand up to seniors on behalf of subordinates when it is right and reasonable to do so. Remember, however, that is a different thing from bad-mouthing those seniors to your subordinates to make points with them. That not only does not work, it is contemptible.

Take a careful look at the impact of the bureaucracy on your ability to do the wartime mission. Although the best of all is to do things in peace exactly as you would in war, you may not have that option. Examine all critical operations in that light. Aircraft shelters are being modified and are fenced to accommodate the contractor and Corps of Engineers—at what defense readiness condition (DEFCON) do you bulldoze that fence and how do you provide access, PSP or...? Safety requires that you fix certain major aircraft problems before you fly—but why let an aircraft sit on the ground in war when you can fly it and perform some missions? Technical data requires procedures that can be shortcut. You must not do that in peacetime because every aircraft is a piece of national treasure, but it might provide additional sorties in war—put your best people on it and see what the options are.

Even for peacetime operations the system needs continuous review. Most regulations are the result of a single incident, CYA written. A careless airman discharges an M-16 and no sentry is allowed to chamber a round—incredible in this day of terrorist threat. Take a look at every restriction on the handling of small arms and base defense weapons. Spetsnaz teams are for real. Challenge the unreal restrictions. Think of what you should have that you do not—mines, night vision devices, and other equipment.

The same applies to all that is critical to combat operations: fuel, spares, munitions, power, communications, shops, ground support equipment, runway, rations, you name it. Identify the assets, set your priorities, determine what needs change for wartime operations, see what portion of that can be changed now and change it, set up the rest for automatic change at DEFCON...! Develop the means to do the latter and check it out. Use ORIs, TAC Evals, inspections, exercises, and day-to-day observations to classify not only procedures but people.

Think war, sort of like I used to think survival when I had a rough engine in that Stearman biplane I started in. "If it quits now I'll go there, if it quits now I'll go over there, and so forth . . ." Know what you intend to do with that facility, that procedure, that man, if the balloon goes up.

You might also review what you're supposed to do in wartime and ask some questions about that. At one time the only plan that had as its primary mission the destruction of

enemy forces was that of the Navy in the Pacific—all the rest had to do with something on the order of changing his mind. When the time comes you do as you are told, but in the meantime you have the obligation to present the problem as you see it.

That's about it, and in closing I'll leave you with two thoughts. First, a question that is nearly always asked of me when I speak at the Air University. "Why don't more generals quit [in protest]?" Two answers. One, by a tough old commander who replied, "I think I can limit the damage better than anyone else I see around here." Another in my own experience. When, the same day, the administration both cut the budget for war reserve spares to 15 percent of the validated requirement and offered honorable discharges to those

who ran away to Canada during SEA, I decided I had to go. Fortunately, Gen Ira Eaker came to dinner that night. He put his finger in a glass of water, pulled it out, and said, "Bryce, it will make just about that much difference—and they'll replace you with someone who agrees that 10 percent is enough for the war reserve. Stay in and fight it." It was good advice, I took it and we did improve the situation. There may well be circumstances where you cannot stay, but carefully study whether or not your leaving will make things better or worse.

The other thing is, when totally frustrated I used to recall that I never really wanted to do anything else and—for all the faults—ours was the only government for which I would be a professional soldier.