

Organizational and Leadership Principles for Senior Leaders

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It is an honor to be asked to contribute my thoughts on Leadership and Organization—garnered over 37 1/2 years of service in the US Air Force—to this important publication. You, the reader, will have the opportunity to help mold and shape our Air Force into an evermore productive and dynamic organization; and an appreciation of the absolutely critical role that leadership plays in that development is essential. I have also included my views on organizational principles because leadership—at all levels—can flourish only if it is not strangled by misguided organizational concepts and approaches that leave little or no room for true leadership, creativity, and innovation at the lower levels where the organization either thrives or flounders. This article is drawn from the transcript of a speech that I was privileged to deliver *extempore* to a large leadership and management symposium sponsored by the Air University a few years ago. I consider the themes as timely and relevant now as they were then, and the spontaneity of those remarks are preferred to the dry dissertation of a written treatise. Throughout my interesting career in the US Air Force I always believed that I could make a difference. You can too. Perhaps these thoughts will help you as you go about that task.

A good way to begin is with the recognition that we manage and lead very well indeed in the United States Air Force. In that regard, during my incarnation as the commander of an AFSC product division (ESD). I had a great deal of interface with people in American industry, I went into their plants. I got to see them at work because they were building our products. I saw good and bad companies. I saw creativity and dedication. I also saw on occasion poor and insensitive management. So I can say without any equivocation that we manage every bit as well as the norm in US industry, and in overall management and leadership terms we do even better. So we have nothing to apologize for. On the other hand, there is considerable improvement that we can bring about. In my judgment the improvement potential falls into two main areas: leadership and the changes in organization that will allow such leadership to flourish. As we look to the future I believe we must base our changes and our concepts on a new appreciation for the nature of human beings. And we must develop far greater understanding of the central—indeed critical—role played by leadership. We also must appreciate far more than we do today how fundamentally our organizational approaches influence the proper functioning of leadership; specifically how some approaches facilitate it and others stifle it.

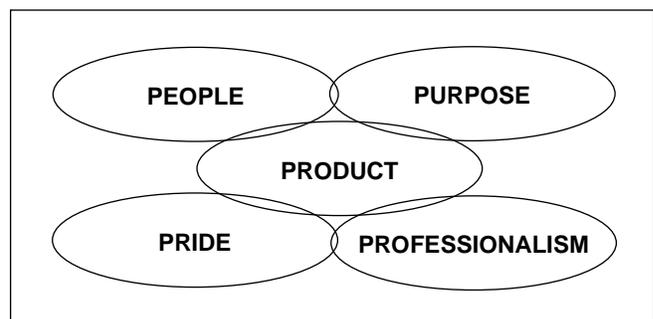
I will have some more words on organization later. Let me simply say at this point that any organization, whatever its nature or orientation, must help create focus and commitment on the part of its members. Throughout my career I both practiced and preached the concept that a successful

organization must be based on core values and core principles that are in harmony with the essential nature of human beings. In my own case, I always thought of any organization that I led as being best served by an organizational model based on “five Ps”: people - purpose - pride - professionalism - product. All are important, and all work together synergistically. Fail to pay sufficient attention to any of the five, and the model fails and the organization flounders. Let’s look at each a bit more closely.

The idea that it all begins and ends with people requires little elaboration. And yet, I have seen case after case of appalling insensitivity to that fundamental truth in all walks of life, public and private. This is the building block for a successful organization: One should always consider the people *first*, treat them well, and place paramount importance on their welfare, morale, and the opportunity to grow and excel.

But it is not enough to have the right people instilled with the right attitude; one must also instill a strong sense of commitment and direction, a strong sense of purpose. Thus, purpose is a key ingredient for a successful organization, and it must be cultivated and nurtured. That sounds self-evident, but far too many managers pay scant attention to it—taking it, by and large, for granted. It has many dimensions, and you have

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to work very hard at it. First of all, there is a variety of purposes at work when you're dealing with people. To begin with, there's the purpose of the organization—the mission, if you will. But there are also the purposes of all the people within it. Those purposes run a wide gamut—such as the need and desire to care for their families, to have a challenging job, to be treated fairly and objectively, to have a degree of authority and responsibility, to get adequate compensation and recognition, and a host of others. Excellent leaders understand there is a variety of purposes at work, and they try to meld a common purpose in two essential ways. One, to get the people to transcend their individual purposes as their primary focus and to get into harmony with the fundamental purpose of the organization to fully support its objectives. And second, excellent leaders are sensitive to those individual purposes and both acknowledge and address them in ways that build unit esprit and individual motivation. By so doing, excellent leaders keep that array of purposes convergent on the mission to be accomplished. And they recognize that bad things happen to an organization where the purposes are divergent and in disharmony. That's what focus is all about, and it must be created—it just doesn't happen on its own.

Next, you must have pride working for you. All of the great outfits that I have seen had tremendous pride. The people in them had pride, and the commanders understood that they had to appeal to that pride by having things to feel proud about. I call pride the fuel of human accomplishment. After all, why pay that extra price to do something especially well unless you can feel good about it, and feel good about your unit as well? Again, you can't feel real pride unless you have something to feel proud about. It can become contagious. But it is also contagious if there is little to feel proud about. The opposite of pride is shame, and its companion piece is apathy. Shame: "Boy, this base is rundown. The facilities are rotten." "Wow, no one pays attention to upkeep here." Good people are turned off by that. I believed deeply that all the bases and facilities in the Tactical Air Command (TAC) should be the best that we could make them. They were painted, they were clean, the facilities were well-kept and the good housekeeping was obvious. We opened self-help stores throughout the command so that people could fix up their own surroundings. It cost some money, but the cost was trivial in comparison to what it bought us. Why did we do it? To engender pride. To convey a pervasive sense of excellence so that our people would feel good about themselves—and perform accordingly. Quality begets quality. Excellent leaders provide a climate that produces pride. They make it happen. It is a critically important element in forging a top-notch outfit.

We all know what professionalism means. And we recognize it when we see it—even when we see it in the October Revolution parade in Moscow. They drive in impeccably straight lines and the vehicles took good. You don't see oil streaks or paint flaking off on the starting grid at Indianapolis for the "500." You get a feeling of professionalism. But we all know that professionalism is far broader than that. It

also covers our norms of behavior, and our commitment to excellence. Excellent leaders facilitate professionalism. More than that, they insist on it. There must be standards to measure against, and they must be high standards. It is only on TV that a "Black Sheep" squadron can somehow convey that being unkempt, untidy, and undisciplined equals excellence in performance. That's pure nonsense. In all my years of watching organizations in the field I have never seen that combination. Outfits with lousy standards are invariably lousy outfits. High standards alone do not ensure a great outfit, but excellent leaders understand that they make up one of the absolutely vital building blocks.

The fifth "P" is product. Good organizations find ways to put their product into clear focus, and also find ways to measure that product—to measure success or failure. That's what we were up to in TAC when I devised the monthly "sortie rate" as an important measurement tool, and put it on scoreboards at the main gates and in base newspapers. That's how we helped create focus and objective assessment in the critically important area of providing training for combat. And that's how we increased the sortie rate each TAC fighter was flying by 80 percent during my six and one-half years as TAC commander. A fundamental part of the entire process, of course, was recognition and reward (and you can't tell the winners without a scoreboard). Every leader should work hard at crystalizing the product(s) of his organization, and to keep them in clear focus for all. He or she should measure objectively so as to mitigate the rampant self-delusion that is an inescapable part of human subjectivity. A few important goals. Ways to measure against those goals. After years of experience, I am convinced of the following: When performance is measured, it improves. (It improves by the mere fact that it is being measured.) Second, when performance is measured and compared (to goals, history, like units), performance improves still more. And when performance is measured, compared, and significant improvement is *recognized and rewarded*, then productivity really takes off. It won't happen unless the leaders make it happen—by being attuned to the dynamics of human nature and by providing the tools and incentives that create focus and mobilize motivation.

That's the model. The "five Ps." All are needed. If you can get them all going strongly at the same time you will have happy, involved, motivated people and a great organization that's a winner in all that it does. Ignore any of the five and you won't. It's that simple.

(Note: During the six and one-half years I was privileged to command TAC, the aircraft sortie productivity increased by a well-documented 80 percent; the safety record improved by 275 percent—reflecting qualitative as well as quantitative improvement and achieved concomitantly with a vast increase in training realism/risk—and our retention soared from a historic low to an all-time high, reflecting improved satisfaction and motivation. Greatly improved mission capable rates of TAC's aircraft represented the equivalent of a \$12 billion savings, and the combat capability in wartime sortie terms more than doubled. These accom-

ishments were carried out with no more people, spare parts inventories that were actually lower for most of this period than when we started, and several years of anemic defense spending. This record was achieved by the people of TAC, not by me. I am convinced however that it could not have happened without the following: (1) The leaders of TAC paid attention to the “Five Ps”; (2) we reorganized extensively to get away from the ruinous centralization and consolidation notions of the past, and a new bottoms-up approach—as represented by COMO, COSO and like initiatives—created leaders at all levels who took the ball and ran with it; (3) we created focus and we empowered, measured, rewarded, and recognized; and (4) we took care of the people. It works. It’s not mysterious.)

Given its critical importance, a few thoughts are now in order on my view of the true meaning of leadership. The individual who runs an activity or function must be totally responsible for that activity, and how the people in it should feel and act. That’s the key word, *responsibility*. Responsibility to make it better. Not just to be a “storekeeper,” but to make it better! And it must be better not merely in intuitive ways and your subjective appraisal, but in visible, measurable ways. Measurable ways so that everyone in the organization will agree: Yes, we’re better—and getting better all the time. And to do that leaders must make it happen. That does not mean the leader is a one-man band. Quite the reverse. Leaders must delegate freely and fully, and foster great participation and initiative at *all* levels. The leader cannot be a “happen back” kind of manager, who waits for things to happen and then “happens back” at them. The leader must be proactive, dynamic, informed, involved. During my years at senior levels, in important jobs in PACAF, USAFE, AFSC, Air Staff, and TAC, whenever I saw a good organization—a good wing, a good jet engine shop, a good finance section, a good civil engineering squadron and the like—I always knew what was going on in that organization. An excellent leader was involved and was making it happen, and was making it better.

What characteristics and qualities do leaders—male or female—exemplify in creating such an organization? They know what’s going on. They have that sense of total responsibility. They set high standards. They lead by example and set the tone. Above all they do not countenance *selective enforcement* of standards. I know of no more ruinous path for commanders than selective enforcement of rules and standards. Because the commander, the leader, the manager, is the role model. If commanders selectively enforce standards, then they are merely teaching selective enforcement to their subordinates. Then they surely will make their own selection process—and different selections at that! Once you start down that road, you’re a dead duck. Take my word for it. I’ve seen it again and again. Excellent leaders have very high standards, and they enforce them without fear or favor.

Also excellent leaders stand for absolute integrity, absolute honesty. They preach the concept of honesty and openness in the organization. That appears self-evident.

However, as an example, many people find it difficult to *want* the IG to come for a look-see. If you’re honest and open about your command, you welcome the IG in your unit. (During my career I not only welcomed IG visits—I *solicited* them.) You want it to be better and you have nothing to hide. Remember that it works both ways. They can tell you how great you are as easily as how poor you are. Whether you’re great or not is up to you. If you’re not, you should want to know it. If you are, and the IG confirms it, then it creates even more pride within your unit. Excellent leaders practice integrity in thought, word, and deed. And they insist upon integrity, honesty, and openness on the part of their subordinates. They also see themselves as responsible for the unit’s discipline. A military organization absolutely depends on discipline and loyalty. (For that matter, any organization in any walk of life depends upon disciplined execution to get its job done.) Fair, reasoned discipline—but discipline nonetheless. When leaders go off the rails in this area, in my experience it is usually because they confuse leniency with leadership. Or they confuse their personal goals with the organization’s goals. What’s a personal goal almost everybody shares? To be liked. Almost everyone wants to be liked. But excellent leaders don’t confuse their personal agenda with the needs of the organization. And they realize—and preach—that discipline and human relations are mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive. Unfortunately some of our younger officers and NCOs have trouble grasping that reality. This is a nation of laws. Good intentions reinforce those laws, not replace them. No one has a right to do wrong. A mistake is not a crime. A crime is not a mistake. Make sure your subordinates understand that you will be tolerant of well-intentioned mistakes but absolutely intolerant of deliberate flaunting of rules and laws. Excellent leaders are firm but fair—and their people know it.

Excellent leaders also instill loyalty. They are loyal up as well as loyal down. They are fiercely loyal down—and they are also fiercely loyal up. You cannot expect loyalty unless you practice it. I have heard a few commanders and managers in talking to their people make unfortunate statements about the ability, insight, or character of certain supervisors up the chain of command. All they are doing is indulging in a public display of disloyalty. There is a way of handling the sometimes challenging relationships with higher authority without invoking disdain and disloyalty. Another important concept that I believe in very deeply is that you have to be loyal to the right principles—and to the right people. One must be very careful about his or her loyalties! Let me give you a case in point. Let’s take an organization where perhaps five percent or less of the people in the organization are pushing the rules and flaunting the standards on dress, bearing, and behavior. Often a naive commander will say: “Well, I know they’re not in compliance, but I kind of hate to hassle the troops. I feel loyal to them.” That’s *not* being loyal to the troops! Most of the people are doing it right. They have pride in the organization and themselves. Those are the troops you need to be loyal to. So if you really have a sense

of loyalty, be loyal to the right people and the right principles. Get the miscreants in line. That doesn't discourage your good people; it encourages them. Often in such cases the commander is being loyal to no one but himself and he sacrifices the unit's well-being to be liked. Loyalty is an issue of many dimensions. The leaders with the right stuff see their obligation to be loyal to the right principles and the right people. Talk about it to your subordinates. It's a critical concept. But it must be applied properly, not abused on the altar of self-aggrandizement.

Excellent leaders fill the leadership vacuums. Again, that doesn't mean they are the whole show or one-man bands. But if leadership vacuums develop because of the shortcomings of major subordinates, excellent leaders fill them by providing more guidance, direction, and oversight. They never forget their overall responsibility for the health, welfare and productivity of their organizations. But excellent leaders do not view such heightened involvement as viable for the long term. Either the subordinates improve through guidance so that they can shoulder their responsibilities properly, or they have to go. In considering that decision, don't forget loyalty to the right people—not necessarily to “good ole Joe.” Also, your pattern of oversight and guidance needs to be heavily influenced by the strengths and weaknesses of your subordinates. Some simply need full authority and pats on the back. Some need more supervision than that. I was privileged to command two fighter wings. My oversight pattern was different in the two because the challenges were somewhat different and there were different subordinates involved with their own strengths and weaknesses. I'm confident I would have had six variations if I had commanded six wings. The point is, don't get in a rut. Don't change your principles or values. However, you cannot duck responsibility for your unit's failures based on incompetence among your subordinates. That won't wash. Don't micro-manage. Do get the job done.

An excellent leader *does not* rule through terror. In TAC I initiated a week-long leadership symposium for all new and prospective wing commanders. (TAC has 32 full-sized wings and numerous other equivalents.) I spent a *lot* of time at those symposiums personally, because I believe it is a fundamental obligation of a leader to be a teacher also, and to pass along what works as well as what needs to get done. During those meetings I made it clear that there were four leadership “pass/fail” items that if violated would be cause for immediate dismissal as a commander. The first: Any kind of personal integrity violation. Covering up something or fabricating facts. Second: Ruling through fear. You know the type. The terror of the valley—the fellow that terrorizes everyone and prizes intimidation as a motivational force. At one time that was a very accepted management style, largely emanating from the armed services of World War II and earlier. A fierce temperament was nearly *de rigueur* in some circles. That's nonsense. We don't need or want that in our present Air Force and should not tolerate it. The third pass/fail item was somewhat related to the terror approach:

temper tantrums. Public display of raw emotion. One can and must speak out unambiguously at times, but that can be done without losing one's temper. My theory on this item was that if commanders cannot control themselves there was no reason why I should want them in control of others. The fourth and final item was serious abuse of office: misuse of government resources for personal gain, sexual indiscretions, and the like. Those were the four that called for immediate dismissal: Dishonesty. Rule through terror. Lack of emotional control. Abuse of office. They are very important because they highlight the qualities we simply *should not accept* of people in positions of leadership, trust, and responsibility. Now none of that means that an excellent leader is not aggressive and positive and dynamic. It does mean that our leaders should be individuals of high principles and good character. And they must have courage.

Shortly after World War II, Gen George Marshall was asked to single out the most important ingredient of a good leader. Was it knowledge? Insight? Experience? Compassion? He thought for a moment and said

“. . . it's courage because all else depends on that” He wasn't talking about the kind of courage it takes to attack a pillbox or a AAA site. Fortunately there is no big shortage of that kind of courage. He was talking instead about courage in interpersonal relationships. The courage to tell it like it is. The courage to admit you're wrong. The courage to change your mind. The courage to discipline subordinates who need it. The courage to stick to your principles. The courage to change what needs changing. The courage to put the organization's needs above your own. Excellent leaders exemplify courage. They don't fear failure. They don't expect perfection, but they don't tolerate obvious incompetence. They don't mind admitting their imperfections. Above all, they have the courage to *want responsibility* so that they can make things better. They have the courage to share fully the plaudits, and accept fully any blame that falls on the unit. They have the courage to avoid the “look good” syndrome. In short, they have real courage, and from that courage flows confidence and conviction.

Excellent leaders communicate, communicate, and communicate. When I talk of communication, I'm talking two-way communication. They make themselves accessible so that they can hear the views from the troops. In fact, they work very hard to establish feedback loops. They freely delegate authority and responsibility. They trust their subordinates. If the subordinates individually prove themselves unworthy of that trust, leaders act on specific cases and not with collective condemnation. They stay well informed. And no one should confuse being well informed with micromanagement. Those are two different things. Micromanagement occurs when you can't resist the temptation to intrude, to tell anyone and everyone how to do things. That's counterproductive. But being well informed is critical—so you can praise as well as condemn; so you can shape and mold; so that you're operating on facts as well as opinions. And to be well informed means that you must do your homework.

So excellent leaders work hard at getting informed and staying informed. Not lost in minutiae . . . but also not guilty of an aloof, uninformed, “olympian” approach that produces dumb decisions and pseudo-leadership. Look out for the leader who “wings it”—who refuses to do the necessary homework. Prize the leader who is involved and informed, and be that way yourself.

There is a sports analogy here, and one shouldn’t carry it too far. When you look at the sports dynasties—teams with a sustained winning tradition—you will find coaches who were true leaders. Men of high principle who had a deep understanding of the workings of human nature. Vince Lombardi with the Green Bay Packers. John Wooden at UCLA. Red Auerbach with the Boston Celtics. Bear Bryant at Alabama. Disciplinarians? You bet. Fair? You bet. Very human. *Uncompromising* on standards. Committed to the basics. (John Wooden said at UCLA they did nothing fancy. They had one offense and one defense. And they won 10 national championships in 12 years by superb execution.) They stressed fundamentals. They stressed core values and core principles. All were great teachers and great communicators. Loyal to their players, but also loyal to their own principles. They instilled a common purpose, and inspired commitment. The principles of leadership are the same whatever the field of endeavor.

How do we build those kinds of leaders? Leaders who are both caring and selfless? Gen Dwight Eisenhower was asked during World War II, “What do you look for in a senior leader before promoting him to bigger responsibilities?” And he answered: “Selflessness. If he’s selfless then you know he’s working for the right purposes in the organiza-

tion.” We can build such leaders by looking for courage and selflessness. We can build such leaders by the major commanders and Air Force leaders of today being the teachers of the leaders of tomorrow. We can build such leaders by prizing the right values and the right qualities. It is my conviction that each generation is brighter and better than the one preceding it. That does not mean, however, that we totally rewrite the script with each new generation. Change is a way of life in the modern world, and change we must. However, that change must be oriented to the values that count, and the principles that work.

We are doing a far better job of creating leaders, and a leadership mentality, at all levels. We still are encumbered by organizational approaches that stifle and stymie that leadership. People cannot exercise authority unless it is given to them. In that regard, it is my absolute conviction that we must break away much more fully from the Air Force’s past enchantment with centralization, consolidation, and other dehumanized organizational concepts. We need more empowerment down through the system. We need to value and measure the outputs, not try to micromanage the inputs. We need to integrate authority and responsibility, not separate them. We need to get back to accountability which is only feasible when you give people real authority.

I would like to close this article by sharing with you the “organizational principles” that I authored during my tenure as commander of Tactical Air Command. They are based on years of observation of what works, and what doesn’t work. They served me well throughout my career. I believe they will be of use to you. Good luck and Godspeed as you shape the Air Force of tomorrow.

Organizational Principles

- 1. Have a set of overarching principles and philosophies. Have an overall theme and purpose.**
 - Ensure they are well understood.
 - Stress integrity and commitment.
- 2. Use goals throughout.**
 - Make them straightforward, understandable, and meaningful.
 - Make it important to achieve them. Reward and praise success.
- 3. Measure productivity/efficiency at several levels.**
 - Devise adequate analytical tools—but don't strangle in paper.
 - Compare to: (1) history, (2) goals, (3) like organizations.
 - Don't use availability of microinformation to micromanage.
 - Look for trends, failure nodes, areas for improvement.
 - Orient to the product. Keep in clear focus for all.
- 4. Create leaders at many levels, not just a few.**
 - Provide wide autonomy and flexibility to achieve goals while preserving overall coherence and overarching principles.
 - Get the leaders where the action is.
 - Streamline staff procedures. Staff supports the line, not vice versa.
- 5. Integrate authority and responsibility—not separate them. Know the difference.**
 - Create a sense of responsibility throughout.
 - Recognize that few accept responsibility without accompanying authority. Create ownership.
 - Invest principal authority in horizontal mission/product leaders—not in vertical functional “czars.”
 - In “matrixing” establish clear lines of authority—tied to the product. Make it clear who is in charge.
 - Link authority to accountability.
- 6. Set up internal competition and comparison where feasible.**
 - Reward success, Provide incentives and motivators. Praise the winners.
 - Address failure in balance with the circumstances.
- 7. Create a climate of pride.**
 - Quality treatment begets quality performance.
 - Never forget the organization begins and ends, sinks or swims with its people. Treat them well and consider them first.
- Instill individual dignity. Provide challenge and opportunity.
 - Invest in people, facilities, upkeep. Payback is enormous.
- 8. Create a climate of professionalism.**
 - Insist on high standards. Don't settle for less.
 - Provide the supporting mechanisms and aids.
 - You reap what you sow. Invest accordingly.
 - Spirit and enthusiasm are the critical measures.
- 9. Educate, educate, educate.**
 - Make it specific. Establish feedback on results.
 - The organization is as strong as its weakest links.
- 10. Communicate, communicate, communicate.**
 - Create the mechanisms. Up/down, down/up—and laterally.
 - Make it clear and concise. Work to eliminate ambiguity and misinformation.
 - Don't depend on strictly hierarchical communication. Augment it. On key issues, communicate several layers deep.
- 11. Create organizational discipline and loyalty.**
 - Without stifling initiative. Reward it.
- 12. Provide everyone a stake in the outcome.**
 - And “humanize” wherever possible—make each job meaningful.
- 13. Make it better.**
 - In measurable, identifiable ways. Instill that philosophy.
 - Work to create a sense of individual and organizational worth. Foster team identification.
 - A proud, confident, and optimistic organizational “chemistry” is the key to success—leaders must create it.
 - Provide the climate and impetus for evolutionary organizational change. Instill a philosophy of creative adoption and adaptation. Stay out in front of problems, changing circumstances—and the competition.
- 14. Make it happen.**
 - Active, vigorous leadership throughout is the magic ingredient.
 - Be informed, involved. Provide the dynamic spark.
 - Work the details—the whole is the sum of the parts.
- 15. Make it last.**
 - Codify, educate, and perpetuate.