Looking for the Perfect Leader

By Major Ronald E. Zimmerman Jr.

"The implications are certainly far more than just platforms. They are organizational. And they're also people skills...we are working on producing leaders for change, not just leaders who are doctrinally capable and competent leaders for warfighting but leaders also for all kinds of missions...capability to continue to deal with an evolving global situation in which the array of threats that you face goes across the entire spectrum..."[1]

Honorable Louis Caldera
Secretary of the Army
October 1999

The perfect leader is a twenty-first-century soldier who is adaptive in nature. This soldier knows and can read enemy actions, can make sense out of those actions, can adapt the commander's plan while maintaining its integrity, and then has the strength to deal with the changes. "Reduced to its essence, adaptive leaders are those who have a feel for the fight. The ability to read the situation allows our twenty-first-century leaders to analyze the cause-and-effect relationships of various courses of action from the beginning to the end of an operation—the second- and third-order effects."[2]

An adaptive leader is capable of translating the variables of combat (geography, weather, capabilities, strategy and tactics, mission, civil and military operations, and time) into situational understanding and cause-and-effect relationships. At the Center for Army Leadership at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, an adaptive leader is defined as "A leader who can influence people—by providing purpose, direction, and motivation—while operating in a complex, dynamic environment of uncertainty and ambiguity to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."[3] Adaptive leaders have multi-dimensional thought and analysis versus sequential or "cookbook-style" processing.

Is the evolving twenty-first-century leader a result of our changing operational environment or changes in the information age brought on by increased technology in digital command and control? Is there a leadership framework for the twenty-first-century leader? How will we train this leader? Just as important, is the twenty-first-century leader attainable and retainable?

Army of Excellence

Success in today's Army of Excellence has a direct relationship to three concepts. First, better soldiers were recruited as a result of the volunteer force. Second, structured training programs were developed with defined tasks, conditions, and standards—all coupled with training realism and assessment. Lastly, junior leaders were supported by the policies and programs of their leaders, both military and civilian.[4] Since the end of the Cold War, the Army has used this foundation to build better training and leaders, while responding to various crises throughout Southwest Asia, Africa, Southern Europe, and Central America. Surprisingly, each of these crises has a commonality of reliance upon young Army leaders in a decentralized execution of mission intent. As an example, a squad leader whose squad is manning a checkpoint is repeatedly making decisions with the potential of second- and third-order national effects.

Operational Environment

The operational environment of the future continues to represent conditions and operations as seen in the Sinai, Iraq, Rwanda, Haiti, Somalia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. These operations include a wide range of stability operations and support operations, to include small-scale contingencies and possibly major theater-of-war engagements. According to the Fort Leavenworth Battle Command Battle Lab:

Worldwide challenges focus a U.S. national-security strategy of engagement that contributes to global stability and prosperity in the twenty-first century. The rapid emerging of regional instabilities and transactional issues (such as terrorism, rogue states seeking power and resources, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, natural disasters, and belligerent actions between state and nonstate actors) signals a less predictable and more diverse world. As a result of the geostrategic environment and the national military strategy, the Army is transforming itself into a force based on capabilities for shaping and responding to crisis, while simultaneously preparing for future threats.[5]

The most dangerous threat our twenty-first-century leaders face will come from an armed force of an industrialized or developing nation that seeks to combat U.S. forces through activities ranging from terrorism, illegal drug trading, illicit arms trafficking, international organized crime, and deliberate environmental damage. This threat will most likely be a dismounted infantry that fights from small towns or enclaves and uses tangible efforts against the rule of law and public opinion with the intent to harass and keep the American force in a defensive posture. The changing threat, complex environments, and more requirements with fewer resources set

operational environmental conditions centered on crisis, change, and instability.

In the future operational environment, young Army leaders will operate on decentralized mission execution only after thoroughly understanding their commander's intent and scheme of maneuver. Their leadership style will evolve around transformational leadership behavior versus transactional, developing and communicating a vision that their soldiers can rally around, and individualized soldier concern and self-sacrifice.[6] Twenty-first-century leaders communicate their vision through words and personal examples to provide purpose, direction, and motivation.

Information Technology

The integration of information technology launched Army leaders into the twenty-first century. Operations Desert Storm, Just Cause, and Joint Endeavor opened a visionary window on the capabilities of the information age. The future battlefield with integrated technology has—

- A larger battlespace at a higher tempo.
- Increased lethality through precision munitions.
- Massing of effects versus massing of forces.
- Increased ability to visualize a battlefield consisting of both friendly and threat forces.

Army Battle Command System technology systems integrate the functional elements required to plan, prepare, and execute a full range of operations in basically any environment—ultimately providing a secure, vigorous, and survivable communications network for voice, data, and video. Information operations give leaders relevant friendly information and enemy intelligence, as well as weather and terrain data. Collectively, relevant information and intelligence provide the situational awareness and battlefield visualization necessary for twenty-first-century leaders.

Increased command-and-control capability gives Army leaders the advantage of enhanced near-real-time situational awareness and ultimately increased understanding for employment of assets at the right time and place. Twenty-first-century leaders rely on situational awareness of their environment to help fully understand their surroundings and recognize how political, cultural, economic, and ethical factors impact their operations. Future leaders will require a deeper understanding of their operational environment as it relates to peace and conflict and the demands those relationships place on their leadership style.

Leadership Framework

For each level of leadership, enhancements in technology have brought great opportunities. Our Army must continue to exploit those opportunities in leader development, while maintaining leaders with character and competence who act to achieve excellence in themselves, their soldiers, and their organizations. The basics of yesterday hold true today. Our Army must continue to develop leaders who provide purpose, direction, and motivation, while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization. Our future will involve fast-paced operations in complex and changing environments, shaped by leaders who are—

- Comfortable with ambiguity.
- Team builders with roles of trainer and mentor.
- Accelerated, passionate learners.
- Flexible and innovative.
- Skilled at developing concepts.
- Tactical experts with technical proficiency.[7]

Our Army has always been and is still about winning our nation's wars. Leadership in the pursuit of that mission is each Army leader's primary responsibility, challenge, and opportunity. Army leadership is solidified by the character, competence, and excellence of its leaders and their values, attributes, skills, and actions.[8] Soldiers of tomorrow will enter the Army with inherent digital and analog skills as a foundation to their scholastic preparations. They will be extremely knowledgeable in network use and capable of making complex decisions. *In some ways, these young soldiers and leaders, having grown up in an environment of technology and expanded skills, will tower over our existing leaders.* But although they will be technologically enhanced, tomorrow's soldiers and future leaders will enter the Army without the knowledge to achieve excellence in leadership.

Field Manual (FM) 22-100, *Army Leadership*, surrounds itself with what leaders must BE, the skills they must KNOW, and the characteristics and knowledge they must apply to DO what they must.[9] The framework of BE, KNOW, and DO (from FM 22-100) describes characteristics of our twenty-first-century leaders.

What Leaders Must BE

Soldiers enter the Army with values and attributes formed by environmental influences, such as family, friends, schools, religion, and television. However perfect these values are, they begin the definition of the total person and describe in essence what that person stands for. From entrance into or association with the Army, soldiers and leaders begin a pyramid of building on their character. The intent is to enhance, refine, and develop their existing values into the seven Army values described in FM 22-100:

Loyalty
Duty
Respect
Selfless Service
Honor
Integrity
Personal Courage

These values are the foundation of leadership. For our Army, they are "points of light" that drive our actions in peacetime through combat, providing the force (soldiers, leaders, and civilians) with building blocks for what is right and wrong. These seven values—coupled with mental, physical, and emotional attributes—collectively influence what a leader must BE.

What Leaders Must KNOW

The twenty-first-century battlefield is fast-paced and riddled with technological enhancements that increase information flow to the leader. These enhancements are all centered on greater knowledge and understanding of the situation. Our twenty-first-century leaders are tactical and technical experts who rely on concrete values to assimilate the complex information flow, conceptualize plans of actions, and utilize interpersonal skills for leadership—all with the intent of mission accomplishment. KNOWing their occupation becomes an essential variable of the leadership model, as our twenty-first-century leaders are passionate learners with a drive for increasing their skills. KNOWing does not come easy; it requires hard and realistic training that is founded on practical experience and individual and collective training. The words "task," "conditions," and "standards" continue to embody Army training.

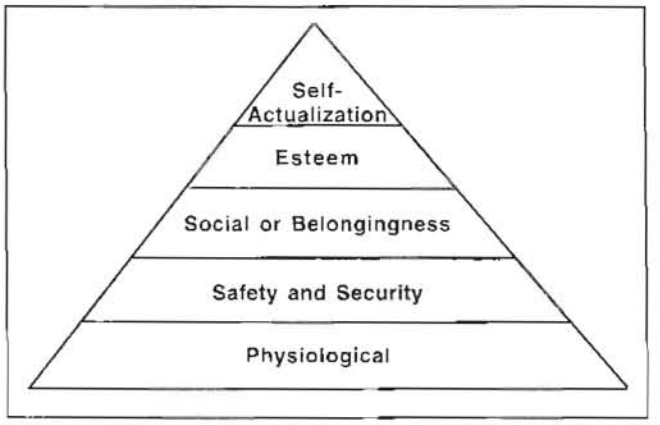
Training of the future must address improvements in technology, however resource-intensive the event. Developing and tailoring realistic training are essential for honing soldiers' and leaders' skills in adaptability, conceptualization, flexibility, and innovation. Training must continue to progress from individual, team, and squad or section up to the unit. Proficiency demands challenging training from the time a soldier enters the Army through unit training to build on the success of previous training and sustainment of perishable skills.

What Leaders Must DO

Leadership is the art of bringing together values and attributes; knowledge and understanding of the working environment and applicable skills; and providing purpose, direction, and motivation. *Leadership is about open dialogue, not Web-site posting.* Twenty-first-century leaders will find their leadership styles (the DO portion of leadership) fluctuating between direct, participating, delegating, transformational, and transactional leadership styles. Varying conditions will determine the style use and, to a certain degree, the mixture of each style for mission accomplishment. Leader characteristics in the twenty-first century may very well be dominated by soldiers' esteem needs.

Influencing Forces

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs (see figure), esteem is defined as peoples' self-respect tied to their pay, responsibility, recognition, and respect.[10] Senior leaders



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

may find that their junior leaders, both commissioned and noncommissioned, struggle to identify their responsibilities. The young leaders' increased capabilities in technology and ability to learn quicker will drive a need for more and more challenging responsibilities. Self-esteem that is tied to responsibility and contributing effectiveness is directly related to the retainability of soldiers and leaders. At the end of the day, leaders and soldiers of tomorrow will (more than ever) need to feel a sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction.

I believe there are basically three types of forces that influence recruitment and retention in our Army: environmental, social, and individual.

Environmental

Collectively, environmental forces such as economic conditions, educational opportunities, political influences, and technological advancements help define American attitudes toward a military lifestyle. A strong economy, fueled by opportunities and advancements in technology, means higher wages. Because of a better lifestyle, young American parents now have the ability to provide their children a higher education without using scholarships offered by the military. As fewer and fewer Americans enter the military and are associated with the military, a lack of understanding develops concerning the importance of variables within the military model. Programs begin to be cut, less capital is resourced for military programs, and soldiers' self-esteem becomes harder and harder to maintain. Military lifestyle becomes a negative "word-of-mouth" expression that is soon a transitional expression for the want of a livelihood outside the military.

Social

Social needs are the sense of belonging and identification with a group. These needs are nurtured by religious activities, professional organizations, sports, or social clubs. The longing to be a part of something and to share the same interests, values, and attributes is a strong need. As we enter the century of technology where computers and digital enhancements dominate the working environment, soldiers can easily become disillusioned about their responsibilities as team members. If

decisions become centralized because of digital enhancements, and the chain of command becomes more of a continuity line for zero-defect versus a command-and-control feature, retention will be lost. If done correctly, twenty-first-century leaders can capitalize on individual social needs as an enhancement to their leadership style. Motivation has second- and third-order effects when working as a team is both challenging and rewarding, and those intrinsic rewards are spread across the life-style environment from the workplace to the sports field.

Individual

These forces include individual and family perceptions of military lifestyle. Soldiers in the armed forces have a unique personality, a particular set of learned experiences, and a perception of how best to achieve their goals. Educational opportunities and funding of educational goals provide great assistance in recruitment. However, without challenging opportunities for growth in esteem and self-actualization, retention suffers. As fewer and fewer Americans have associations with the armed forces and our borders remain safe, families begin to think less about a strong defense. Reliance on a strong economy fuels further budget cuts on low-priority governmental programs. The lack of familiarization with the armed forces and a complete sense of security lead to military program cuts. I propose that our advertising efforts focus on the intangibles of military lifestyle—the benefits of being a team member, camaraderie, esprit de corps—and that we get back to the grassroots feeling of why soldiers remain members of the Army team. Let's advertise the goodness of our organization, not just what the Army gives us as a preparation for life outside the military after four years.

Conclusion

Technology enhancements provide the foundation for twenty-first-century operations. Leaders will improve their ability to make timely decisions; manage abundant amounts of information; and communicate purpose, direction, and motivation—all to accomplish the operational mission. Digital skills become normal operating procedures in the exploitation of information technology for situational awareness, understanding, and decision making. Tough, creative, realistic individual and collective training based on existing training theories will drive our future leaders to higher plateaus in education and job prowess. This realistic training will help our leaders and soldiers develop the knowledge and skills required for winning our nation's wars. Our future leaders will maintain the Army values of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage to BE, KNOW, and DO as their leadership framework. Our Army must build on recruiting and retaining only the best and ensure that each and every soldier and leader is challenged as part of the unit team.

We, as any Army and nation, must not fall into the Chicken Little "sky-is-falling" mentality. As we enter this transformational period, we must remember that each challenge is really an opportunity to improve. The U.S. Army Engineer School's command sergeant major says it best: "Take time and a little risk and have faith; your subordinates will follow you. The odds of success are in your favor."[11] Leadership basics hold true. Leaders of the future must never forget that leadership is about open dialogue, not about Web-site posting. As we search for the perfect leader, we must incorporate leader development into all levels of training and fully embrace flexibility and encourage creative innovation.

Major Zimmerman will attend the 00/01 class at the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He was previously a doctrine writer in the Directorate of Training, U.S. Army Engineer School, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Endnotes:

[1] Colonel Jon H. Moilanen, Chief of Staff, Task Force TLS, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, "TLS Strategy Brief," TRADOC DCST Training O&O Conference, Fort Benning, Georgia, 8-10 November 1999.

[2] Based on my informal research, interviews, and working knowledge of Force XXI, Joint Contingency Force, Strike Force, Interim Brigade Combat Team, and Task Force TLS from September 1998 through date of this article.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Lieutenant General (Retired) Frederic J. Brown, Ph.D., *The U.S. Army in Transition II*, Brassey's (US), Inc., Washington, 1993, p. 126.

[5] "TLS: A Strategy for the Human Dimension in Twenty-First Century Readiness," Battle Command Battle Lab Leavenworth, Task Force TLS, http://cacfs.army.mil/CIDivision/Tls/strat28.htm

[6] Major Kevin S. Donoue and Major Leonard Wong. "Understanding and Applying Transformation Leadership." *Military Review*, Vol. LXXIV, No. 8, August 1994, pp. 24-31.

[7] Based on my informal research, interviews, and working knowledge of Force XXI, Joint Contingency Force, Strike Force, Interim Brigade Combat Team, and Task Force TLS from September 1998 through date of this article.

[8] Ibid., pp.1-3.

[9] U.S. Army Field Manual 22-100, *Army Leadership*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 31 August 1999.

[10] Barry L. Reece and Rhonda Brandt, *Effective Human Relations in Organizations*, 6th ed., Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Massachusetts, 1996, pp. 151-175.

[11] Command Sergeant Major Arthur Laughlin, "Lead the Way: Have a Little Faith." *Engineer Professional Bulletin*, Vol. 30, April 2000, p. 49.