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Leadership in a Combat Zone

by William G. Pagonis

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Too often, leadership is presented as an abstract undertaking, a matter of vision and values rather than practical detail. But in Gus Pagonis's world, the work of leadership is as gritty as the desert sand and as homely and prosaic as the red loose-leaf binder he carried everywhere as he directed the logistics of the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Pagonis, a lieutenant general in the U.S. Army when he wrote this piece, learned his leadership lessons in places like Vietnam's Mekong Delta. In this article (originally published as "The Work of the Leader"), he recounts the gripping tale of how he ignored his commander and plunged into a withering cross fire to rescue a group of stranded soldiers. But the roots of Pagonis's philosophy of leadership go back much further, to his native Charleroi, Pennsylvania, where he developed a powerful capacity for empathy. Leaders who send their people out to do battle in the business world have much to learn from Pagonis. Above all, they can learn from the general's ability to see the world from the foot soldier's point of view even as he surveys the big picture.

It has been a year and a half since I completed my tour of duty in Saudi Arabia as head of the United States Army's 22nd Support Command. And in the wake of the Allied victory over Iraq, I've read and thought a lot about my logistics profession. But I've also done a great deal of thinking about the goals, qualities, and prerequisites of leadership. And based on that reflection, I've reached a number of conclusions.

For one, I've concluded that leadership is only possible where the ground has been prepared in advance. To a certain extent, I'll be the first to admit, this process of ground breaking is beyond the control of a lone individual in a large organization. If the organization isn't pulling for you, you're likely to be hobbled from the start. Fortunately for me and for thousands of other officers like me, the army goes to great lengths—greater, I would argue, than any other organization—to groom and develop its leaders. Like all my peers in the general officer ranks, I have been formally educated, informally mentored, and systematically rotated through a wide variety of postings, all designed to challenge me in appropriate ways (that is, to push me without setting me up to fail) and to broaden my skills and knowledge base.

But a leader is not simply a passive vessel into which the organization pours its best intentions. To lead successfully, a person must demonstrate two active, essential, interrelated traits: expertise and empathy. In my experience, both of these traits can be deliberately and systematically cultivated; this personal development is the first important building block of leadership.

The leadership equation has another vital piece as well. Leaders are not only shaped by the environment; they also take active roles in remaking that environment in productive ways. In other words, true leaders create organizations that support the exercise and cultivation of leadership. This can only be achieved through rigorous and systematic organizational development.

The work of leadership, therefore, is both personal and organizational. The bad news is that this means hard work—lots of it. The good news is that leaders are made, not born. I'm convinced that anyone who wants to work hard enough and develop these traits can lead.

Charisma, Presence, and Other Notions

No military commander would downplay the importance of personal presence in leadership. It's a vital attribute, particularly in a combat setting. Almost every combat-hardened officer can recall that fateful moment of truth when his or her command presence was first put to the test.

In my own case, that test came in 1968, during my first tour in Vietnam. My boat company had already more than proved its mettle, transporting artillery barges and supplies through intermittent sniper fire up and down the rivers of the Mekong Delta. But during the Tet Offensive of February, we were beset and besieged as never before.

Late one night, we received word that an orphanage was under attack and that we needed to transport troops to the site as quickly as possible. Leaving our artillery barges behind, we took about 30 volunteers in six boats and went five miles downriver. I wasn't told at the time, but the rest of my outfit was then ordered to follow along behind with our artillery barges in tow.

My small convoy had just landed the infantry troops near the orphanage when I got a radio call that our trailing barges were stopped dead in the water. The first barge had come under fire and "crabbed"—gone sideways in the river—and now two dozen boats were trapped behind the barge. Our battalion commander got on the air, advised us of the extreme danger upriver, and ordered us not to go back and rescue our comrades.

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It was a moonlit night. From where we sat, chafing under our orders to stay put, we could look upriver and see the tracers burning across the water where the boats were stuck. They were in deep trouble. On the spur of the moment, following a time-honored tradition in the military, I developed "radio trouble"—that is, I turned the communications gear off—and addressed the crew of four on my small patrol boat. "We've got to go back and help," I told them, "but I don't want to force you. Anyone who doesn't want to join can stay here, no questions asked."

I'm proud to say that every one of those soldiers volunteered. We turned one of our boats around and headed up-river with tracers zinging over our heads and bullets bouncing off the sides of the

boat. When we reached the crabbed barge, I could see that the man behind the steering wheel had frozen. I jumped from my boat onto the barge and shook him back into action. In short order, we got the boat turned around and headed home again.

One leader's orders had been ignored and another's followed. Why? Adrenaline was one contributing factor. So was loyalty: Our comrades on and behind the barge needed help immediately. But most important was my soldiers' trust in my judgment. Had I not already earned that trust and developed a command presence in a thousand undramatic settings, those soldiers would not have followed my lead. Had I not demonstrated my confidence that we could pull off the rescue, they would not have followed. My troops would have taken the sensible course and followed the radio's orders not to go back upriver.

This same lesson applies to leaders in private industry. We are misled by the popular-culture portrayals of leaders. Movies and television have to deal in superficialities and sound bites. They have to emphasize charisma, a mysterious and seductive quality. But when they do so, they overlook the real roots of leadership.

Expertise and Empathy

I can think of no leader, military or business, who has achieved his or her position without some profound expertise. Most leaders first achieve mastery in a particular functional area, such as logistics, and eventually move into the generalist's realm.

Expertise grows out of hard work and, to some extent, luck. Hard work develops a skill base, and luck gives us the chance to apply that base.

Throughout my childhood, my parents ran small businesses: first a restaurant, and then a small hotel with a restaurant. Every member of the family was expected to pitch in. For my part, I scrubbed floors, waited on tables, did kitchen prep, and helped keep the books. All through high school and college, my responsibilities expanded. I learned new things and kept my hand in old things.

After college graduation and ROTC training, I sought and won an army commission. My first assignment was at Fort Knox, where those years of hands-on business training proved immediately

useful in streamlining the unit's mail operations. On the strength of this success, I was asked to tackle the mess hall. This was even easier: I was already a minor expert in private-sector mess halls. Because I had expertise, I was successful; and because I was successful, I was identified by my superiors as a potential leader.

There are dozens of instances where I've grumbled my way through an assignment only to discover that the assignment has taught me a great deal and that this learning is applicable in unexpected ways. Back in 1971, for example, I suffered through a stint of desk-bound research in which I was part of a team charged with analyzing LOTS (logistics over the shore) vehicles. I was sure I was wasting my time, crunching numbers and drafting memos rather than leading troops.

Exactly 20 years later, I was in charge of—among several other resources—a flotilla of LOTS ships, which plied the coasts of Saudi Arabia serving as a backup for our truck convoys. Because I had been a member of the team that helped specify their design, I knew exactly how to use those vessels. I had expertise, which not only helped me do my job but also reinforced me as a leader in the eyes of my subordinates.

Owning the facts is a prerequisite to leadership. But there are millions of technocrats out there with lots of facts in their quivers and little leadership potential. In many cases, what they are missing is empathy. No one is a leader who can't put himself or herself in the other person's shoes. Empathy and expertise command respect.

I got my first inkling of this back in the 1950s, when I was a newsboy in my hometown of Charleroi, Pennsylvania. I started out at the age of nine, hawking afternoon editions of the *Charleroi Mail* on the corner of Fifth and McKean. Things started going along pretty well for me there. I had regular customers, and I could shout out the headlines with the best of them: "Korean armistice signed! Read all about it!"

I soon began to notice, though, that the real market for papers was in the local bars and restaurants, rather than on quiet street corners like my own. At my little stand, I was averaging 50 copies

a day. In the bars and restaurants, especially around dinner time, you could sell that many copies in two hours—and get tips, to boot.

I decided to mine this rich vein of opportunity. But the older newsboys, mostly 14 and 15 years old, dominated the commercial district, and they didn't appreciate my efforts to compete. A group of them paid me a visit, gave me a few licks, and suggested that I stick to my quiet little corner and stay out of their restaurants.

I did just that—for a little while. Then I went right back to selling papers in those crowded barrooms and restaurants. Brash I was, even foolhardy; but I wasn't dumb. The opportunity was very good. And even then, I had a keen sense of justice. Why should the big kids control the best territory just because that was the way it had always been done? Even to the nine-year-old Gus Pagonis it was obvious that if you were going to do business, you'd better do it in the right place, and the big boys controlled the right place. I took a few more licks, but soon established myself as a savvy young businessman who wouldn't back down from a fight. I gained the respect of the older boys and they no longer bothered me.

Years went by, and I gradually moved up in the newsboy hierarchy. Then one day I had a disturbing realization. I was now the "establishment." I was one of those big boys whom the young up-and-comers had to go up against. It seemed that I had a clear choice. I could perpetuate the cycle or I could act in the spirit of empathy, based on my vivid recollection of what it felt like to get knocked around. I chose the latter course. At my urging, we came up with an arrangement that didn't cut too deeply into the profits of the veteran newsboys yet still gave the younger kids a chance to flex their entrepreneurial muscles. My peers went along with the plan because they knew I understood the situation from all sides. And I had earned a leader's respect from the younger kids through empathy.

Empathy was an absolutely vital quality in the context of the Gulf War. We asked ourselves constantly: What do the other people on our team need? Why do they think they need it, and how can we give it to them? The military always has its share of bendable rules. Can we find one to fit each situation?

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Our hosts, the Saudi Arabian people and their government, were among the most important objects of this kind of attention. King Fahd had pledged his country's complete support and cooperation, and the Saudis delivered on that promise unstintingly. But both sides knew that the deployment of a half million "infidels" into a strict Muslim society would be a daunting challenge.

We made our share of mistakes. Early in the most hectic phase of the Desert Shield deployment, for example, we decided to establish an Allied medical matériel command in the port city of Ad Dammam. American soldiers, male and female, reported to the site to unload boxes and crates of supplies. Unfortunately, we had no idea that the building we were moving into was located next to a particularly devout Muslim community, whose members were deeply offended by the sight of women with uncovered hair and rolled-up sleeves working up a good sweat in the desert sun. Members of the community complained to the local religious police, and our female soldiers were soon subjected to catcalls and jeering.

Before the situation developed into a crisis, U.S. military leaders met with the appropriate Saudi religious and civil officials to get a handle on the cause of the disturbances. We soon reached a simple compromise: All U.S. military personnel would henceforth wear long-sleeved shirts in the city, and our female soldiers would keep their hair covered with their hats. It was a small concession but one that greatly pleased the religious police responsible for enforcing the *Sharia,* or Islamic law.

We learned a great deal about the sensitivities of a Muslim community through these negotiations, and we applied the lessons in our subsequent dealings with the Saudi population. We also took our learning one step further. It was clear that our hosts

were inclined to avoid conflict with their 550,000 guests, at least until things were approaching a crisis stage. It was our responsibility, therefore, to anticipate their needs and avoid crises. One day several months after the ground war ended, I realized that our two inactivated firing ranges were still littered with unexploded ordnance and that the bedouins would soon be traversing these areas again. We put ourselves in the shoes of the bedouins and of the Saudi officials who had to protect the interests of these desert wanderers. We cleaned up the ranges well before the Saudi Arabians had to put pressure on us to do so. With that we earned their continued respect and cooperation.

Empathy also helps you know where you can draw the line and make it stick. For example, some Saudi Arabians disapproved of the U.S. female soldiers driving vehicles and carrying weapons (activities in which Saudi women do not engage). I made it clear that from the U.S. Army's perspective, a soldier was a soldier and our lean logistical structure absolutely demanded that all our soldiers be allowed to use the tools of their trade. That line stuck.

Empathy counts for even more on the individual level. This was brought home to me one afternoon in August 1991, some six months into Desert Farewell. A very young private was sent to me by the military police for disciplinary action. The facts of the incident were clear enough. On the previous night, two MPs had demanded to see the private's ID. He cussed them out and wound up spending the night in jail. He arrived in my office looking remorseful and more than a little bit scared and launched into a hurried and jumbled explanation. It was hot the night before, he said; he was tired, the MPs were picking on him, and so on. But when he finished making his excuses, he said simply, "I screwed up. I shouldn't have done it."

I made him think things through from the MPs' point of view. They had a job to do. Terrorist attacks were still a very real possibility, and the recent tragedies in Beirut and Berlin were very much in our minds. Tight security and ID checks were therefore still needed to protect the safety of everyone at the base. Then, after telling my wayward private that I would personally thank the MPs for their vigilance, I let him off the hook. He was out of my office in a flash.

Why did I bend the rules? Because empathy demanded it. This was a tough period. The war was long since over, and the vast majority of Coalition forces were already back in their home countries. But we logisticians were still there, picking up and packing up the theater of operations. We were fighting a subtle battle against the troop's perception that the "important" work of the war had already been accomplished, that the danger was past, that we were only mopping up after the main event. And, in fact, the weather was very hot—hotter than earlier in the summer when smoke billowing from the oil fires in Kuwait had blocked out the sun. Inevitably, some tempers were wearing thin in the ranks. My young private had already learned his lesson, and he was more useful to me outside the brig than in.

The Steps of Leadership

I had the very good fortune early in my army career to serve as an aide to a general officer in Germany. In that context, I visited most of the battalions and companies around the country. This was the military equivalent of a controlled experiment, in the sense that all of the commanders in the division were working on the same mission. But each of them approached his assignment a little bit differently—how he took care of his troops, how he briefed the results of his actions, how he presented himself. From company to company and from battalion to battalion, what was really changing was leadership.

Even from my youthful and uninformed vantage point, it was obvious that some things worked and others didn't. And over time, I was able to distill the techniques of effective leadership that would work best for me. Cultivating leadership in yourself and in others should be done on both a personal and organizational level.

The first important step in the process of developing effective leadership may appear self-evident: Know yourself. What's your expertise? What are your strengths? And, just as important, what are your weaknesses, and how can you improve? Regularly scheduled self-examinations are a must for building and sustaining leadership.

Once you've assessed the raw material, you can draw up a plan that builds on your existing skills and knowledge. Take any steps necessary to sharpen those talents you already have or to

compensate for ones you lack. Most leaders engage in public speaking, for example. Are you one of those rare leaders who can get away without making public appearances? Or could you benefit from some coaching in voice projection and deportment?

This kind of self-analysis allows you to be real—in my experience, a vital contributing factor in effective leadership. A person who is always playing to his or her weaknesses can't inspire much confidence in others. This is something to watch out for in matters large and small, since it's the cornerstone of presence. For example, I use a gentle kind of humor quite a bit. Humor helps me make contact with other people. But I only use humor because it comes naturally to me. I'm real when I use humor. Those who aren't, shouldn't! In the same spirit, truly hopeless public speakers—of whom there are very few, by the way—should concentrate on grooming effective proxies.

A related challenge is to learn how and what to communicate. This comprises not only good speaking skills but also good listening skills and the ability to project and interpret body language. Many years ago, I set up formal systems to elicit constructive criticism from my subordinates. One of the first criticisms I got back was that I didn't listen well. This surprised me. Up to that moment, I thought my listening skills were as good as the next person's—maybe better. I poked around, asked questions, and eventually discovered that one basis for this judgment was a bad habit on my part. While listening to others, I had a tendency to sift quickly through mail or do an initial sort of my paperwork. My body language projected a lack of attention. With minor adjustments to my routine (maintaining eye contact during these meetings, relegating paperwork to later in the day), my report card improved. I also took to heart the advice of a wise commanding officer who said: "Never pass up the opportunity to remain silent." My subordinates soon began citing my listening skills as a strength rather than a weakness.

I took to heart the advice of one commanding officer: "Never pass up the opportunity to remain silent."

A third vital aspect of personal development relates to expertise: The leader has to know the mission. What needs to be accomplished? How can your expertise most effectively be channeled to do the job? This is an important part of the hard work I mentioned earlier. Leaders have to do their homework!

During the Gulf War, I directed my planning team to compile a binder, known within the command as the Red Book, which was a complete and constantly updated collection of data outlining the developments of the conflict. Some four inches thick with charts and tables, it contained virtually all of the information I needed to keep abreast of our situation. While I was in transit from one theater location to another, that book was practically joined to me at the hip. General Schwarzkopf (or another general in the field or stateside) would frequently call me on the road or in the air with requests for specific information: how many tanks here, how much fuel there, how quickly can equipment be moved somewhere, and so on. I know that both my subordinates and superiors were regularly impressed with my almost magical grasp of the numbers. No magic was involved—I just studied the information in that binder every chance I could.

When the elements of personal leadership development are in place, a leader can concentrate on building an appropriate context for leadership. Not surprisingly, this kind of organizational development depends, in large part, on a leader's ability to empower and motivate others to lead.

Moving Outward: Organizational Development

By definition, leaders don't operate in isolation. Nor do they command in the literal sense of the word, issuing a one-way stream of unilateral directives. Instead, leadership almost always involves cooperation and collaboration, activities that can occur only in a conducive context.

I am convinced that an effective leader can create such a context. My goal, as I set out to build a leadership-supporting environment, is to combine centralized control with decentralized execution.

This involves, first, extensive delegation. In a sense, this prerequisite is a logical extension of the personal awareness and development described above. A person who knows his or her

expertise and the mission can find the right people to fill gaps. As a result, authority is pushed further and further down into the organization.

Delegation is only half of the story, though. The other piece involves system building to ensure that the right information flows back up through the organization to the leader. This is a special challenge in an organization as traditionally bureaucratic as the army.("Staff grows, paper flows, no one knows," as the old saying has it.) But I suspect it's true for all human organizations.

Organizational development, then, includes a delicate balance of effective delegation and system building. Over the years, I have developed a number of techniques and tools that help maintain this balance and ensure a smooth-running operation.

The first of these techniques is to shape the vision. Simple is better, since delegation depends on a shared understanding of the organizational goal. In the Persian Gulf War, we coined short sentences that captured the aim of our organization. These little nuggets were then aggressively disseminated. During the deployment phase of the conflict, for example, you couldn't walk 20 feet within our headquarters without encountering the message "Good logistics is combat power!" During the redeployment phase, safety was the overriding priority, and the vision became "Not one more life!" Napkins, banners, buttons, newsletters: Every possible tool was used toward building and underscoring a shared vision.

Vision must be defined by the leader. But it is the subordinates who must define the objectives that move the organization toward the desired outcome. "Objectives," in my lingo, are the concrete steps by which the vision will be realized. They must be specific and quantifiable. They should give subordinates the opportunity both to act and to assess the impact of their actions. For example, in my terminology, "Win one for the Gipper" is a statement of vision. By contrast, "Average 3.5 yards per carry on runs off tackle" is an objective articulated to advance the vision.

A second key responsibility of the leader in building an organization that supports leadership is to educate. On the first day a new person enters my command, I hold an orientation session to clarify my personal style, the organization of the

command, our vision, and our shared objectives. Everyone needs to start off with the same information base. I specifically direct new arrivals to read my notebook of bulletins—a series of memoranda in which I have codified the key methods and tools of my command. The bulletins remain in a central location where they can be accessed by any member of the command at any time.

In addition, I regularly hold educational meetings, informally referred to as "skull sessions." These involve gathering a large group of people from many functional areas into one room and leading them through a discussion of how they would handle a range of hypothetical but plausible challenges. The goal, I tell them at the outset of the meeting, is to "do our Monday-morning quarterbacking on Saturday night." (In other words, better to think through the Sunday game in advance than to kick the corpse on Monday.) Through this device, my people are challenged to think in collaborative ways, to be aware of the real complexities that most situations present, to become comfortable asking one another for advice and help, and, most important, to anticipate problems.

For the benefit of both the individual and the larger organization, it is vital to give and get feedback. Of course, every interaction with a subordinate, peer, or superior is an opportunity to do just that and should be used accordingly. But I've also found the need to implement a number of mechanisms to reinforce the feedback loop.

The organizational effectiveness (OE) session is one such tool. Once or twice a year, I take my top-level officers out of their normal routines for a one- or two-day organizational retreat. On neutral ground, we go through role-playing exercises, take time for relaxation, and do some formal feedback exercises.

In this context, I've hit on one small innovation that helps to keep things productive. Each member of the command is asked to evaluate the person to his or her left. In doing so, the evaluator must identify three positive qualities in the person being scrutinized as well as three areas where that person could improve his or her performance. Criticism tends to be taken more easily when it is not perceived as an attack. It was in this context, in fact, that I first learned about my bad listening skills—and, as we all know, the higher the rank, the harder to teach.

My second favored method for giving feedback has been a formal part of the army organization for quite some time: the evaluation report. I put a personal twist on the ER by making it a multistep process. The conventional ER is a one-step process. After a subordinate has been in a given position for about a year, the superior officer fills out a written form rating the subordinate's performance. The problem is that the subordinate can perform below standard and not know it until a damning evaluation is filed away in the personnel files. This shortchanges everybody—the individual, the evaluator, and certainly the organization.

In my command, the ER is a two- or even three-step process. Each individual is evaluated about one or two months into his or her tenure in a position. During this meeting, the superior points out areas of the job at which the ratee is particularly accomplished and identifies other areas that need work. In the months that follow, each individual has an opportunity to develop and improve his or her skills before the final evaluation report. In the meantime, the organization benefits from improved productivity and open communication.

In complex organizations, it is important to emphasize formal communication with structures designed to complement the chain of command. My notebook of bulletins is one such tool. There are many others.

My workdays, for example, are punctuated by a series of meetings. The first is the daily "stand-up," attended by at least one representative of each functional area in the command. (During the Gulf War, the stand-up was a chance for people to make quick status reports and then field questions.) At the end of each day, we hold a "sit-down" meeting, which gives us a chance to engage in a more concentrated kind of analysis. The sit-down also uses a "three up, three down" device similar to the one employed in my OE sessions. Each functional commander reports daily on three areas in his or her command that are improving and three areas that need attention.

In between these two meetings are other communications devices. For example, a few hours of my afternoon are divided into 15-minute segments called "Please see me" time. When someone's ideas have puzzled or intrigued me, I ask them to come in and talk during one of these slots. In addition, any member of

the command who has a question or a problem can sign up for a quarter-hour slot. This part of the scheduling process is completely democratic. Any member of the command can sign up for a meeting, and no one ever gets bounced through rank-pulling.

And, finally, there's my favorite low-tech, high-yield information transfer system: the three-inch by five-inch index card. I stumbled upon the 3×5 as a mode of communication completely by accident early in my career, and I've used it ever since. In the Gulf, questions or comments written on 3×5s were guaranteed to move through the chain of command (informing appropriate personnel along the way) until they reached someone with the knowledge and authority to respond to them, and then they were returned to their authors—all within 24 hours, guaranteed. During the height of the conflict, I got about 100 a day, and every one was useful.

Formal methods of information transfer are very important, but I find that you don't get a complete view of what's actually happening in an organization unless you also open regular informal communication channels. For straight talk, nothing compares with the comments I pick up during my daily basketball game with the troops. Similarly, when my wife and I invite troops into our home for a lasagna dinner, we hope to show them that we, too, are human and approachable.

Sometimes the soldiers come to me; other times, I go to them. I devote a good deal of my time to "management by walking around." In the Gulf, MBWA took me from the frontline logbases, where ammunition, food, and fuel were distributed to the troops, to the matériel dumps. I spent time with the MPs guarding the main supply routes and with the "wash rack" jocks responsible for cleaning and sterilizing the tanks and helicopters we were about to send home. I visited enemy prisoner-of-war camps that had been hastily erected as the ground war ended, the docks and airfields, and a hundred other more or less remote facilities.

I worked hard to be a real and constant presence throughout the desert in all parts of the command. But the Southwest Asian theater was so large that I couldn't be in enough places often enough. Recognizing that fact, I deputized a group of soldiers—dubbed the "Ghostbusters"—as my proxies. They went into the

desert as my official eyes and ears, making sure everything was running smoothly, giving and gaining a clearer sense of the theater's overall organization.

What was the point of all of this meeting, mentoring, and moving around? In a sense, it was to touch as many people, and as many kinds of people, as possible. Leaders must be motivators, educators, role models, sounding boards, confessors, and cheerleaders—they must be accessible, and they must aggressively pursue contact with colleagues and subordinates.

Muscle Memory

Successful leadership is not mysterious. Leaders must set their own agendas and use the tools and techniques best suited to help them achieve their goals. But leadership is not entirely formulaic. Leaders must learn to trust their instincts and play their hunches.

When the fighting ended in the Gulf, an army unit was asked to make the physical preparations for the peace talks. As the talks grew near, I developed a strange conviction—a gnawing in the pit of my stomach—that something wasn't right up in Safwan, Iraq, the site of the talks. The night before the meetings were scheduled to start, I commandeered a Black Hawk helicopter to go up and take a look and discovered that the job was less than half completed. The necessary supplies had been caught in a monumental traffic jam and hadn't gotten through. Through a superhuman effort, working all night with the materials that were at hand, we made it possible for the peace talks to proceed on schedule. (I'm sure that history will record only that General Pagonis inexplicably fell asleep during the talks and slipped off his chair!)

It is said that once a basketball player practices his shots enough, he develops a "muscle memory" of how to sink those shots. Only then is he truly free to improvise on the court. Similarly, I'm convinced that if someone works hard at leadership, his or her instincts will tend to be right. His or her hunches will be based on expertise and empathy, and they'll be good ones. Leadership will seem to come easily.

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As a lieutenant general in the United States Army, William G. Pagonis led the 40,000 men and women who ran the theater logistics for the Persian Gulf War. Pagonis, the author (with Jeffrey L. Cruikshank) of Moving Mountains: Lessons in Leadership and Logistics from the Gulf War (Harvard Business School Press, 1992), currently serves as executive vice president of supply chain management at Sears, Roebuck and Company.

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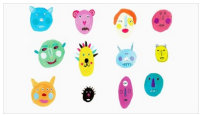

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