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LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM WEST POINT

Major Doug Crandall
Editor



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

More Praise for *Leadership Lessons from West Point*

Many of our graduates will tell you that over their four-year careers at West Point, the lesson they have learned to value most can be expressed in two words: “Leadership matters.” Some of the best leaders in the world have contributed to *Leadership Lessons from West Point*. They articulately and earnestly explain the key points of leadership strategy, values, development, styles, and situations. Readers of all backgrounds will learn from the experts’ personal anecdotes, accessible prose, and sage advice.

—Lieutenant General Franklin L. Hagenbeck, 57th Superintendent of the
U.S. Military Academy at West Point and 1971 West Point graduate

This is a wonderful primer for the student of leadership whether young or old, regardless of profession. Doug Crandall has expertly crafted some of the latest commentary on leadership, from both a practical and theoretical perspective, into an easy and extremely relevant work. *Leadership Lessons from West Point* is a must for your professional collection and a great tool to help you develop your followers into future leaders.

—John W. Rosa, Lieutenant General, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), president of The Citadel,
The Military College of South Carolina, and 1973 Citadel graduate

The U.S. Military Academy has proven without a doubt that leadership skills can be developed and strengthened. The same leadership skills required to prepare troops, to plan logistics, to formulate military strategies, to execute tactics on the battlefield, and to motivate soldiers in combat can be applied to business.

—Henry Cisneros, chairman, CityView

Can a book on leadership from a military academy help leaders who don’t march to breakfast? If your organization has a mission and people, then stop what you’re doing and read this book. After that take your team for a tour of any military installation and learn about its mission. Then . . . hold on . . . watch what happens!

—Brigadier General Randal D. Fullhart, U.S. Air Force, Commandant, Air Command and Staff College

The U.S. Military Academy is a national treasure. It lives, breathes, and inculcates leadership skills into those bright young men and women who enter the gates and go through the forty-seven-month immersion process. The front of these skills is the Department of Behavioral Science and Leadership, so ably led by Colonel Tom Kolditz. This book captures the essence of what we collectively teach the future leaders of our Army and our Nation.

—Seth F. Hudgins Jr., Colonel, U.S. Army (Ret.) and president, Association of Graduates

The essays in *Leadership Lessons from West Point* offer insights from authors with many years of experience in the field. Topics such as learning from failure, gaining confidence as a leader, developing leadership qualities in others, and the various aspects of leadership discussed can be applied to all walks of life. Whether you are involved in the military, business, or civil service, if you want to be an effective leader, the lessons in this book will be relevant to you.

—Richard W. Schneider, Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard (Ret.) and president, Norwich University

The first thing you will notice about this book is that the authors are mostly Captains and Majors—people on the front lines of leadership issues. It is a hands-on work for leaders in every walk of life. Great stuff!

—Dennis M. McCarthy, Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)
and executive director, Reserve Officers Association

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leader to leader INSTITUTE

Established in 1990 as the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management, the Leader to Leader Institute furthers its mission—to strengthen the leadership of the social sector—by providing social sector leaders with the wisdom, inspiration, and resources essential for leading for innovation and for building vibrant social sector organizations. It is the social sector, in collaboration with its partners in the private and public sectors, that is key in changing lives and building a society of healthy children, strong families, decent housing, good schools, and work that dignifies a diverse, inclusive, cohesive community that cares about all of its members.

The Leader to Leader Institute provides innovative and relevant training materials and resources that enable leaders of the future to address emerging opportunities and challenges. With the goal of leading social sector organizations toward excellence in performance, the Institute has brought together more than four hundred thought leaders to publish over twenty books available in twenty-eight languages and the award-winning quarterly journal, *Leader to Leader*.

The Leader to Leader Institute engages social sector leaders in partnerships across the sectors that provide new and significant opportunities for learning and growth. It coordinates unique, high-level summits for leaders from all three sectors and collaborates with local sponsors on workshops and conferences for social sector leaders on strategic planning, leadership, and cross-sector partnerships.

Building on a legacy of innovation, the Leader to Leader Institute explores new approaches to strengthen the leadership of the social sector. With sources of talent and inspiration that range from the local community development corporation to the U.S. Army to the corporate boardroom, the Institute helps social sector organizations identify new leaders and new ways of operating that embrace change and abandon the practices of yesterday that no longer achieve results today.

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CONTENTS

A Note from the Leader to Leader Institute xi

Frances Hesselbein

Foreword xiii

Jim Collins

Acknowledgments xvii

About the Contributors xix

Introduction xxv

Doug Crandall

PART ONE: LEADERSHIP AND VALUES DEVELOPMENT

1 Becoming a Leader Developer 3

Eric G. Kail

2 Learning from Failure 16

Doug Crandall

3 You Must Lead Yourself First 32

Greg Hastings

- 4 Influencing Your Organization's Moral Philosophy 44
Brian Tribus
- 5 Developing Organizational Values in Others 62
Chip Daniels
- 6 The Authentic High-Impact Leader 88
Sean T. Hannah
- 7 Leader Development and Self-Awareness
in the U.S. Army Bench Project 107
Dennis P. O'Neil, Patrick J. Sweeney,
James Ness, Thomas A. Kolditz

PART TWO: LEADERSHIP STYLES AND SITUATIONS

- 8 Teaming High-Potential Talent 133
Jack Jefferies
- 9 Leading as If Your Life Depended on It 160
Thomas A. Kolditz
- 10 Creating Urgency and Inspiring Your Team 188
Robert Morris
- 11 Quiet Leadership 206
Eric J. Weis
- 12 Leading Without Words 218
Jeff Bergmann
- 13 Developing Charisma with Caution 238
Dena Braeger
- 14 Trust: The Key to Combat Leadership 252
Patrick J. Sweeney

PART THREE: LEADING ORGANIZATIONS

- 15 Socialized Leadership 281
Todd Henshaw

- 16 Leading at the Business End of Policy 296
James Tuite
- 17 Harnessing the Power of Culture and Diversity for Organizational
Performance 313
Remi Hajjar, Morten G. Ender
- 18 Developing Organizational Commitment
by Putting People First 338
Todd Woodruff
- 19 Managing Expectations When Leading Change 363
Everett S. P. Spain
- Index 387

A NOTE FROM THE LEADER TO LEADER INSTITUTE

It is a great honor to write the opening words to this book; the chapters were written by a group of highly qualified educators who are teaching or have taught at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Army officers and civilians who live “Duty, Honor, Country.” This is one of the most important leadership books the Leader to Leader Institute (formerly the Peter F. Drucker Foundation) has published in our sixteen years. Providing leadership resources for leaders in all three sectors, twenty-one of our books are now traveling the world in twenty-eight languages, and *Leadership Lessons from West Point* will now join this group in providing leadership wisdom and practices as relevant to a corporate executive as they are to a leader of a social sector organization, university students and faculty, and government leaders at every level. This is a book for our tenuous times, a book “just in time.”

At the Leader to Leader Institute, we believe this book will become an indispensable guide for leaders of the future, leading the organizations of the future. This book brings together remarkably gifted Army officers, educators, and leadership developers to look at every aspect of leadership. The chapters are based not just on academic theory but on the on-the-ground experience of these leaders, their own impressive educational backgrounds, and their research as faculty members. Although the authors make references to war, life-and-death decisions, and heroic action, their focus is on leadership, mission, values, teamwork, organizational learning and culture, leading change, and other topics that cut across

all organizations, across public, private, and social sectors. This is a book for leaders searching for authenticity and relevance, and for philosophies to make their own. Each chapter is a gift to leaders who are challenged to redefine the future—some would say “called” to help redefine the future.

Leader to Leader’s twentieth book, *Be, Know, Do*, adapted from the U.S. Army Leadership Manual, was our first collaboration with the U.S. Army. Now we bring you another amazing leadership resource from expert military leaders. These authors and faculty are part of a moving, inspiring adventure in learning that prepares our young men and women, cadets at West Point, for a future that no one can adequately describe, yet a future in which these young officers must lead well, playing their part in sustaining democracy.

These leadership lessons will resonate across the sectors and around the world. *Leadership Lessons from West Point* is a book to keep close at hand as an indispensable leadership handbook, even as we share it widely with fellow travelers on their own leadership journeys.

August 2006

Frances Hesselbein
New York

FOREWORD

Jim Collins

In 2005, I had the privilege of visiting West Point for a gathering of leaders from business, social sectors, and the military. One of my hosts, a captain in the U.S. Army, had obtained an M.B.A. after graduating from West Point. “What most surprised you about business school after your West Point experience?” I asked.

“The misperceptions my M.B.A. classmates had about Army training and its relevance for leadership outside the military,” he responded. He then described a debate that had erupted in one of his classes, and how one of his classmates had challenged, “In the Army, you don’t really need to lead because soldiers are so well trained to follow orders.”

If leadership exists only if people follow when they have the freedom not to follow, I thought perhaps his classmate had a point. After all, civilian life does not have the same clear chain of command as the U.S. Army. When I pushed on this point, the captain responded that, yes, the Army has a clear chain of command, but Army leaders face one giant reality that business leaders rarely face: “In business, if you make bad decisions, people lose money and perhaps jobs,” he said. “In the military, if you make bad decisions, nations can fall and people can die.”

The phrase stuck in my mind: *people can die*. In the Army, it matters to your very existence if your leaders are competent. It matters if your leaders are trustworthy. It matters if your leaders care more about themselves than they do about their people or the mission. Your life may well depend on it. Combine this truth with the larger mission of protecting national interest and advancing the cause of

freedom, and you get a context for leadership rarely faced in the normal course of business.

This wonderful book gives us a glimpse into the lessons of leadership that can best be grasped in the face of high stakes and large consequences. Upon receiving the manuscript, I began my standard reading process of flipping through the chapter title pages to get a sense of the overall work before delving into a page-by-page read. But along the way, I found myself drawn in, stopping to read entire chapters before completing my initial scan, increasingly excited by the project. These writers blend their very real experiences with thoughtful frameworks, bringing them to life with vivid stories.

Disciplined people who engage in disciplined thought and take disciplined action: this framework captures much of what separates greatness from mediocrity. The Army has long embraced this concept with its own framework of leadership: Be, Know, Do. This framework runs through these chapters, like a thread of DNA. The beauty of this book lies in the dualities of leadership—knowing when to follow and when to not follow, the responsibility to question and the responsibility to execute, dedication to mission first and dedication to your comrades above all. These dualities highlight the point that disciplined action does not mean rote action. Disciplined action means that you begin with a framework of core values (be), you meld those values with knowledge and insight (know), and finally you make situation-specific decisions to act (do). Leadership, the chapters in this book teach, begins not with what you *do* but who you *are*.

Encoded into the West Point approach are two eternal truths. First, the medium- and long-term future cannot be predicted, and second, the best “strategy” in a volatile environment lies in having the right people who embody your organization’s core values and can adapt to unanticipated challenges. West Point exists not to train soldiers for a specific war but to develop leaders who can adapt to whatever war might be thrust on our nation—no matter what continent, no matter what conditions, no matter what form of warfare, no matter what enemy.

West Point answers the question “Can leadership be learned?” with the idea that whether you like it or not, you *are* a leader. The real question is whether you will be an *effective* leader. In reading this book, I realized that West Point also addresses a question that I’ve been wrestling with: Can Level 5 Leadership be developed? In our research into why some companies become great while others do not, my colleagues and I observed that leadership capabilities follow a five-level hierarchy, with Level 5 at the top. At Level 1, you are a highly capable individual. At Level 2, you become a contributing team member. At Level 3, you become a competent manager. At Level 4, you become an effective leader. Stepping up to Level 5 requires a special blend of personal humility and professional will—the capacity to channel your personal ambitions and capabilities into a larger cause

or mission. Level 5 leaders differ from Level 4 in that they are ambitious first and foremost for the cause, the organization, the mission, the nation, the work—*not themselves*—and they have the will to do whatever it takes (within the bounds of the organization's core values) to make good on that ambition. These chapters show that West Point is in the business of developing not just leaders, but *Level 5* leaders; the ideals of service, dedication to cause, loyalty to comrades, sacrifice, courage, and honor shine through these pages.

Toward the end of my visit to West Point, I had the privilege of conducting a small seminar for soon-to-graduate cadets, invited by a few members of the faculty who penned some of these chapters. One senior cadet, who would almost certainly graduate to dangerous duty in the Middle East, said to me that he felt more fortunate than his friends who had gone to places like Harvard and Stanford. “No matter how the rest of my life unfolds,” he explained, “I know that I have served a larger cause than myself.” Earlier that day, a senior general officer commented that this current generation of West Point graduates stands as one of the most inspired—and inspiring—since the graduating class of 1945.

I came away from those sessions struck by the contrast between these young men and women and my graduating class from college in 1980. For two decades, we lived in a world of artificial stability, made possible by America's triumph in the Cold War, combined with an era of perverted prosperity culminating in the stock market bubble of the late 1990s. My generation had no larger cause, no overriding ethos of service, no great object that extracted our sacrifice. And we are poorer for it. The West Point leaders who introduced me to these inspired cadets, and who write so passionately in this book about the principles of courage, sacrifice, and commitment, helped me to see that this younger generation of idealistic men and women deserves not to be just students of their elders but—equally—our teachers.

September 2006
Boulder, Colorado

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership (BS&L) at the U.S. Military Academy are tremendously grateful to all those who have helped us share our ideas with readers beyond the gates of West Point. Larry Olson of John Wiley and Sons is the true hero. This book stems from his creative energy and his tremendous efforts. *Leadership Lessons from West Point* (and our special edition of the *Leader to Leader Journal*) never would have happened without his belief in our mission, our talents, and our ideas. Similarly, we thank Frances Hesselbein and Brigadier General (Retired) Robert Gaylord for the Leader to Leader Institute's continued support of BS&L and West Point. Their contributions have certainly helped strengthen our department. We hope that the nineteen chapters in this book help to strengthen the leadership of the social sector.

We thank Ruth Mills, Allison Brunner, Elizabeth Forsaith, and Beverly Harrison Miller for their tremendous contributions to this book. Their constant guidance throughout the editing and publishing process transformed our raw ideas into what we hope are valuable lessons for others.

Most important, we thank the soldiers, colleagues, and cadets who have inspired us, helped us, and kept us on track during our own leadership journeys and teaching endeavors. Without you, we would have nothing to share.

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INTRODUCTION

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Strong leadership may be the most important factor in an organization's success, because what happens at the top (of the company, group, team, or squad) has an impact on everything else. If the leader's attitude is poor, the team's attitude will follow. Be it a Fortune 500 company, a small business, a nonprofit, an infantry platoon, a school, a community, a family, or any other group that has a common purpose, leadership matters. As James Tuite, the author of Chapter Sixteen, wrote, leadership is "not just about crafting sound policies and incentive programs; rather, it's much more about inspiring the people who implement the policies to care enough about the organization and each other so that they will act as good stewards . . . even when no one is watching."

Leadership Lessons from West Point came about because of the enormous interest in a special supplement to the *Leader to Leader Journal*, a quarterly publication from the Leader to Leader Institute and Wiley Subscription Services. That supplement presented articles from active-duty Army leaders who were teaching in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, New York. The articles offered insight into what leadership meant to them—in both war and peacetime—and described their views on quiet leadership, mission, values, taking care of people, organizational learning, and leading change, among other topics. This book develops those ideas much further than the special supplement could, with nineteen chapters from a range of contributors at all levels of the Army, from cadet to colonel. It captures the

essence of what we do: synthesize experience, scholarship, and teaching in an effort to educate, train, and inspire our Army's future officers. This synthesis of leading, studying leadership, and teaching leadership is a unique aspect of our academic and developmental experience. In our classrooms, as in this book, we bring forth concepts and theory, relate stories from our own leadership endeavors, and help cadets make sense of their own experiences as they look toward the future. Throughout this book, we open a window into this world of leadership development that is the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at West Point and share some of our candid reflections, compelling stories, best practices, and frontline ideas.

We begin the book with our passion and our reason for being. In the opening chapter, "Becoming a Leader Developer," in Part One, on the topic of leadership and values development, Eric Kail turns what is sometimes seen as an organizational responsibility into a personal mandate. Developing leadership skills is not the ultimate goal of great leadership, argues Kail. Great leaders seek to develop other leaders because those leaders will affect hundreds, if not thousands, of other people. Kail identifies three phases of leader development: learning from the best leaders, leading, and reflecting on why you lead.

In Chapter Two, "Learning from Failure," I share lessons from my own leadership experiences and my time in the classroom at West Point. Reflection on failure is often championed as a recipe for leader growth. But reflection on true failure can be distasteful, humbling, and difficult. I waded through three distinct levels of leadership failure: failures in what we do, failures of who we are, and failures of who we want to be, using the three examples that have taught me the excruciating pain but immense value of honest reflection: two from my days as a young lieutenant and one as a parent. The lessons I have learned can apply to any leader in any organization: that failure requires us—that is, those who desire to do better—to solicit candid input from others, take a hard look at our actions, and diagnose our own needs for improvement.

Chapter Three provides a real-time picture of leadership development from someone just embarking on his leadership journey. Recent West Point graduate Greg Hastings, in "You Must Lead Yourself First," reflects on a few lessons he has learned during his time as a cadet: to take responsibility for his own actions, that great leaders need to be great followers, and that even just one person can make a difference and lead successfully. He not only reminds us of some leadership basics but also demonstrates the reality of what we do at West Point: turn high school students and young enlisted soldiers into men and women ready for immense leadership challenges on the front lines.

Chapter Four demonstrates how important it is for an organization to ensure as it develops and supports leaders that those individuals internalize the estab-

lished core values. In “Influencing Your Organization’s Moral Philosophy,” Brian Tribus describes a wide variety of situations in which people need to embody their organization’s values in order to make the right decisions: from corporate America, with examples from Beech-Nut and Johnson & Johnson, to wartime, in Somalia in 1993 and in Iraq today. And he offers many recommendations for how to live up to your organization’s “honor code,” as the students at West Point are taught the meaning of theirs—that “a cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do.”

Chip Daniels follows up on Tribus’s theme with a reminder that values are the bedrock for our decisions and organizations must inculcate those values from the outset. Chapter Five, “Developing Organizational Values in Others,” describes the Army’s systematic approach for developing values, which is useful for leaders in all walks of life. This approach uses five steps or methods: attracting people who already share the organization’s values; socializing new members; establishing role models; telling stories, myths, and legends about positive or negative actions that reinforce those values; and using feedback mechanisms and performance evaluations to embed the organization’s values.

Internalization of values is a crucial aspect of organizational success because values cannot be faked. As Sean Hannah articulates, the very best leaders are those who exhibit authenticity. In Chapter Six, “The Authentic High-Impact Leader,” he makes a case for leadership development that produces a strong commitment to a core self-concept. In times of great social pressure, role conflict, or other dilemmas that pull us away from who we are, leaders who know themselves and act in accordance with their values, beliefs, and self-understanding will ultimately prove most effective.

Chapter Seven concludes Part One on leadership and values development with advice for all organizations. In “Leader Development and Self-Awareness in the U.S. Army Bench Project,” Dennis O’Neil, Patrick Sweeney, James Ness, and Thomas Kolditz collaborate on a description of how the Army develops great leaders: just as successful baseball teams can look down the bench and call prepared players into the game, the Army is developing a future generation of leaders who are prepared to assume command at the highest levels. O’Neil and colleagues describe a 360-degree rating system for three levels of leaders: executives, midlevel managers, and direct leaders (in Army terms, senior leaders, junior leaders, and noncommissioned officers). At each level, “the bench” has identified the top behaviors that set apart exceptional leaders—for example, senior leaders should keep cool under pressure and be able to handle bad news well, junior leaders need to have guts and be trustworthy and dependable, and frontline supervisors need to be good role models and build and motivate their teams—in all organizations.

The chapters in Part Two take up the topic of leadership styles and situations. The authors in this part look at specific aspects of leadership that translate into lessons for all. Chapter Eight opens this part with “Teaming High-Potential Talent.” Jack Jefferies writes about the difficulty of managing groups of people who all want to be leaders, drawing on his own experiences as a member of a championship skydiving team, as well as situations in corporate America (at Aetna and Lotus Development Corporation during the creation of Lotus 1–2–3), and in sports teams—from West Point’s Sprint Football Team to the National Football League and the Philadelphia Eagles. Jefferies offers five strategies to leaders who want to lead teams of elite performers who are also often brash and reluctant team players.

In Chapter Nine, “Leading as if Your Life Depended on It,” Thomas Kolditz shares his ideas on leading in dangerous and high-risk situations. He calls these *in extremis situations*, where leaders must give purpose, motivation, and direction to people when there is imminent physical danger and where followers believe that leader behavior will influence their physical well-being or survival. He draws on experiences with military troops and SWAT teams, as well as skydiving teams and mountain-climbing guides. He identifies seven characteristics of such leaders and offers lessons on how to develop such leaders and how to lead in dangerous and high-risk situations. Moreover, these lessons help develop great leaders in all situations, in any organization; in *extremis* leadership is authentic leadership.

In Chapter Ten, “Creating Urgency and Inspiring Your Team,” Robert Morris shares lessons for leaders who struggle (or have ever struggled) to move their people beyond mediocrity. He describes how important leader motivation is: leaders need to provide focus and direction to the people they are leading. They also need to build strong relationships, one on one, because it is not possible to build a relationship with a group. Simultaneously, to achieve their goals, leaders need to set priorities and never lose sight of the overall mission or goal.

“Quiet Leadership,” by Eric Weis, wades into the nuances of leadership style. In Chapter Eleven, he paints a picture of leaders who communicate intent, inspire, listen, care, and drive optimal performance, all without fanfare or cheerleader personas. Weis brings a new perspective to the challenge of leadership, for successful leadership is not high-energy volume but, as he writes, a “hidden reserve of formidable strength.”

Chapter Twelve shows the importance not only of what leaders say but how they say it. In “Leading Without Words,” Jeff Bergmann describes how communication affects leadership and provides a primer on how people can more effectively read and use body language; physical space; facial expressions, body movements, and touch; voice level, pitch, speed, and volume; and the perception of time (for example, a leader who keeps someone waiting is sending a message). Some people use these signals deliberately to reinforce or even contradict what