

Strategic Leadership for Strategic Landpower

Make Explicit That Which is Implicit, and Do What Your Boss Needs You to Do

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We would like to share 12 principles of strategic leadership based on our personal experience. We believe their application can support the success of leaders and organizations as the Army works through the strategic application of landpower in its role as the foundational element of the joint force. Successful strategic leaders generally follow personal rules devised from their own hard-earned experience, as well as the business



rules of the organizations they lead. To gain widespread credibility with the joint force and policy makers regarding the strategic utility of landpower, senior Army leaders will need to develop the high level of leadership competency that ensures their bosses can make the hard decisions necessary to achieve national strategic objectives. Good leaders learn from experience and develop personal rules over time. Strategic leaders will use the lessons they learn to improve their leadership competency, and they will share lessons they believe could help other leaders improve their competency.

As military leaders advance through years of service, they become more focused on managing strategic issues for the

Army—issues that affect ever-larger numbers of people and organizations. The Army's lieutenant colonels, colonels, general officers, sergeants major, and senior Army civilians are its strategic-level leaders. They face the challenges of leading in a way that ensures the Army can apply landpower to achieve positive strategic outcomes across the range of military operations.

The Role of Strategic Landpower

Our nation's land forces must sustain the capacity to dominate traditional land warfare. They must assure allies and deter adversaries. They must compel enemies to change their behavior in ways favorable to the

Gen. Robert W. Cone and Gen. Raymond T. Odierno at Al-Faw Palace, Baghdad, Iraq.

United States. The principal players in the application of strategic landpower are the Army, the Marine Corps, and Special Operations Command. Each is designed for a different purpose, but those purposes intersect on the land where people live and interact. Our discussion here focuses specifically on the Army.

The Army is applying the strategic landpower concept across the “prevent, shape, and win” construct. This means in the absence of a crisis, the Army will employ landpower in key areas to maintain stability, build awareness, and establish relationships that prevent or resolve conflict before it becomes a bigger problem. Regionally aligned forces are an example of how the Army does this now. We maneuver forces worldwide to maintain strategic balance and prevent conflict, deterring aggressors and assuring our friends. Maneuvering strategically means engaging partners with mission-tailored forces to advance shared interests and maintain a relative positional advantage over time.

Once a crisis occurs, the Army will use landpower via expeditionary maneuver to restore strategic balance. Because of the time and effort invested during pre-crisis activities among the people of a particular region, the force will be better prepared to apply landpower responsibly and effectively during decisive operations. When conflict escalates to war, our Army will compel changes in enemy behavior through the ethical application of violence. All the Army’s efforts at the tactical and operational levels should be focused on achieving the desired national strategic end state.

Twelve Strategic Leadership Principles to Make Leaders Successful

All Army leaders must succeed at two practical tasks. The first is to make explicit that which is implicit. This means they must understand vision or intent and put it into definable, measurable, positive action. The second is to do what the boss needs them to do, whatever that is and whether or not they understand or agree with it. Both tasks address how we support our civil and military leaders, equip them to make the right decisions, and assist them with their strategic responsibilities. We offer these 12 principles to help Army leaders understand the strategic perspective and enhance their leadership competency.



DOD photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chad J. McNeeley

From his office at the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta receives an update from Army Gen. Charles H. Jacoby, Jr., commander, U.S. Northern Command, about the wildfires threatening Colorado Springs and the U.S. Air Force Academy, 28 June 2012.

Vision—take the time to get it right. Strategic leaders must clearly articulate what needs to be done and, in a general sense, the acceptable ways their organizations conduct business. Crafting a vision is no easy task, and it takes time to get one right. An effective vision helps subordinates establish the campaign objectives that produce desired strategic outcomes. It should be supported by thorough research that stands up to close scrutiny.

To ensure your vision is clearly understood by your intended audience, get the perspective of those in the organization with experience and credibility. Your vision should be simple, relevant at each subordinate echelon, and easy to communicate to others.

Make mission command reality. The Army’s mission command philosophy advocates the use of mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within

the commander's intent. Mission command requires investment in subordinate development—a time-intensive process. Strategic leaders foster a climate that promotes mission command principles all the time, not just during deployments and exercises. They provide a clear commander's intent for routine matters as well as complex operations. They coach, teach, and mentor. Strategic leaders are transparent and easily understood. Commitment to mission command allows you to enable and be comfortable with the independent initiative of your subordinate leaders because you are reasonably certain those subordinates understand your expectations.

See yourself accurately. An interesting story about the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius says that as he paraded through the streets of Rome receiving the accolades of his fellow citizens, his servant would whisper into his ear, “You’re just a man ... just a man.”

Humility is critical to your success as a strategic leader. It keeps you grounded in the mission and the interests of your soldiers. It helps prevent toxicity. Most of us do not see ourselves very well without some sort of outside look, and at the strategic level, it is easy to assume things are better (or worse) than they really are. Climate surveys and 360-degree evaluations are valuable tools for you to get that outside look and gauge your success, or determine where you need to improve. Seeing yourself as others see you provides valuable perspective on your performance.

Remember that we are all on the same side. There are many players on the joint team, and an inclusive approach is beneficial. At the strategic level it is always best to presume those with whom we disagree are operating in good faith. Strategic leaders know that no one wins in a personal conflict, and those who make professional differences personal develop negative reputations quickly.


Look for opportunities to compromise, keep an open mind, and remain focused on the strategic objective. Save your energy for the battles you need to fight against the enemy, not your teammates.

Develop decision points ahead of policy. Often we hear that we have to get policy right first. At the strategic level, it is absolutely true. Set the policy correctly and the rest follows. However, events on the ground often outpace policy.

A viable practice, uncommon but effective, is to work backwards from policy implementation to develop your decision points. Then, should circumstances create gaps between policy and necessary decision points for implementation, you have at least bought some time to work with policy makers to close those gaps since you have identified issues earlier in the process.

Hurried decisions generally produce poor results and bring regret. It is wise to discuss ideas informally with the trusted agents on your staff to determine what they really think about decisions you are about to make. Candid feedback is a rare thing; seek it out.

Use all the tools available. Clausewitz said, “When all is said and done, it really is the commander's *coup d'œil*, his ability to see things simply, to identify the whole business of war completely with himself, that is the essence of good generalship.” This statement is no less true today. However, commanders now have many more tools at their disposal to inform their strategic decision making and problem solving—to enhance their *coup d'œil*.



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Your staff, your subordinate commanders and their staffs, and your peers all have skills that can help you solve complex problems. Do not work alone; build a convergence of perspectives from multiple sources to make well-informed decisions. Never underestimate the effectiveness of using indirect leadership to build consensus and organizational support.

Take care of people. Taking care of people is a strategic imperative. Leaders take care of people by training and developing them so they achieve success in the Army profession and as part of the joint team.

Invest in a professional relationship with your subordinates and reach out to their families. Understand their goals and devote time to mentoring them. You know you have done right by your subordinates when they seek you out as a mentor, and when they achieve professional success years down the road.

Never put your leaders in a bad situation. A strategic leader will deal with highly complex problems and likely will need to solve them quickly. It can be too easy to put undue pressure on subordinates, even unintentionally, when facing tough challenges. Subordinates want the team to be successful, and they want to support their leader. This represents power that any leader must employ carefully and thoughtfully.

Therefore, you must avoid putting undue pressure on your subordinates, while still providing your boss the same timely, accurate advice and support you expect your subordinates to give you. Moreover, when your boss makes a decision, you must execute it as if it was your own.

You probably provide one of many information feeds your boss must consider, but the boss's decisions may be predicated on other information or guidance unknown to you. Therefore, unless something is obviously missing or just does not make sense, you should proceed as directed. If you need to, huddle with your boss to gain understanding of the situation and his reasoning.

Think completely outside your lane. Good strategic leaders know as much as possible about their roles and responsibilities, as well as those of other people that affect their organizations and missions. They have a thorough understanding of outside influences on their areas of responsibility. There is no artificial separation between the organizations of strategic leaders.

Take the broadest possible view of everything that affects your lane and get smart about those things. Professional curiosity leads to greater understanding. The broader your informed perspective, the better service you provide others as a strategic leader.

Challenge convention. Ask questions that challenge what passes as conventional wisdom in your organization. Challenge people to explain the status quo—why things are the way they are—especially when your instinct tells you your organization can do better. Trust your instinct, build confidence in your academic and analytical rigor to address problems, and produce thoroughly investigated decisions.

Develop a team of deep, critical thinkers who can wrestle a problem to the ground, work through the analytics, determine where your thinking is wrong or right, and build an accurate set of options for your consideration.

Tell your boss when he is wrong. Sometimes the boss is wrong. There are different ways to bring it up, depending on the situation, but the best approach is always to use tact and candor. Communicating with your boss can be hard; telling him he is wrong is even harder.

The best way to start usually is with private, face-to-face discussions, especially for contentious issues. You can bring up how you disagree with your boss in a meeting if asked. Conveying disagreement through staffs can be effective, as long as it is done respectfully. Creating a forum for diverse perspectives sometimes works. So does a written message or memorandum, but never surprise your boss with something in writing. Try to settle the issue orally first. Use writing to follow up. Pay attention to how your boss best receives certain kinds of information, and use good judgment.

Build personal relationships. Personal relationships—friendships—can foster effective working relationships with counterparts in other organizations. Building friendly networks inside and outside your organization can greatly enhance your strategic leadership.

Use your seniority to collaborate with other senior leaders outside your organization and agency to achieve common objectives. This is particularly important with interagency teaming. Friendly relationships with your counterparts in the Department of State, United States Agency for International Development, and other governmental agencies can be very valuable when making strategic-level decisions across the joint, interagency, international, and multinational community.

Conclusion

As a strategic leader, giving intent-based orders in a positive command climate where everyone understands their left and right limits is essential. Never lose perspective about what you are doing strategically and how it will play out tactically. This is a key to balancing intellectual energy with practical application. Know the facts before you make decisions; you can never be too well informed when dealing with tough problems. Operate through your network and within your spheres of influence to make various strategic



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Teddy Wade

U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, center, and Brig. Gen. Clarence K.K. Chinn, right, are briefed by Col. Bill Burleson during a visit to the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, La., 1 May 2012. Chinn was the commander of the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk at the time.

efforts fit together logically. Finally, remember that people do things during war they would not normally do. Build systems to guard against negative influences, complacency, and poor discipline.

Strategic leadership encompasses the field grade and flag officers, interagency partners, Foreign Service

officers, and ambassadors engaged in furthering our national interests. Applying it effectively can be difficult. Doing it well will be personally gratifying and extremely important to the future well-being of our Army and Nation. We hope some or all of our 12 principles can serve you well. ■