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Love and Leadership

“Leaders always seek improvement, improvement requires change, and successful change requires each of us to contribute our talents to the effort.”

(Grinston, McConville, & McCarthy, n.d., para. 6)

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When defining leadership and its principles, words such as influence, character, presence, develop, direction, and motivation are usually at the forefront. However, one word you may not hear often is love. Most associate the term with sentimental emotions involved in a relationship or marriage and not with a military leadership style. However, love and leadership are intertwined. The Servant Leadership Model, one of the leadership models adopted by the U.S. Army, lists love as one of its foundational principles. This article will provide a conceptual understanding of how the principle of love can

be successfully applied and implemented in the U.S. Army, and discuss what love is and how it equates to leadership.

What is Love?

To show the interconnection between Army leadership and love, we'll first compare definitions. Army Doctrine Publication 6-22: Army Leadership and the Profession defines leadership as the “activity of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization” (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 1-13). While the Servant Leadership

Model defines love as “the act or acts of extending oneself for others by identifying and meeting their legitimate needs and seeking their greatest good” (Hunter, 2004, p.86). Therefore, we can draw the connection that love, as defined by the Servant Leader Model, falls under the intent of the U.S. Army’s People First Strategy by taking care of subordinates’ needs, which is the foundation of the Servant Leadership Model as well as the Sergeant Major of the Army’s “This is My Squad” initiative (Kowalski et al., 2021).

Love is Patient

A good leader demonstrates love through patience and self-control when interacting with superiors, peers, and subordinates. Patient leaders control their urges, impulses, and emotions and channel their energy in a positive, effective, and efficient manner. Demonstrating patience allows good leaders to avoid jumping to conclusions, and enables them to remain calm, logical, and rational in high-stress situations. On the other hand, impatient leaders may act impulsively and generate organizational stress, chaos, and toxicity (LaFalce, 2017). These types of leaders decrease unit productivity and their behavior goes against the Army Values and the principles of servant leadership.

Love is Kind

Kind leaders give attention, appreciation, and encouragement to all personnel with whom they interact regardless of rank or station. The concepts of kindness and strength are not mutually exclusive. “They fit together effectively. The most successful leaders treat their team members with kindness. They realize that kindness is motivating” (Keyser, 2015, para. 2). In describing the importance of kindness in leadership, former Nebraska senator and governor, Bob Kerrey, said “Unexpected kindness is the most powerful, least costly, and most underrated agent of human change” (Keyser, 2015, para. 1).

Love is Humility

Humble leaders are genuine, authentic, and not boastful or arrogant. Leaders with true humility have an accurate awareness and assessment of both their strengths and weaknesses and understand how they factor into the larger contextual picture. Humble leaders realize they are not the focal point of the universe; they understand they are part of something greater than themselves (Griffing, 2019). In acknowledging their strengths, they seek opportunities to contribute to the mission. In acknowledging their weaknesses, they seek out opportunities for growth and development.

Love is Commitment

Great leaders make a three-fold commitment: to the organization and its mission, to their team, and to



After two full days and nights of events to test their stamina, technical prowess and mental acuity, 16 teams crossed the finish line April 14 at Camp Rogers here, concluding the 2019 Best Ranger Competition. (U.S. Army photo by Patrick Albright, Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning Public Affairs)

themselves. Although leadership is selfless and concerns organizational outcomes and meeting the needs of others, paradoxically, it is imperative leaders also love and commit to themselves. This better prepares them to serve the organization and the team. When leaders show commitment and love for their team, as well as themselves, they are better prepared for the adversity, challenges, and obstacles that will inevitably present themselves throughout their career.

How Does Love Equate to Leadership?

The NCO Creed states, “All Soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership; I will provide that leadership. I know my Soldiers and I will always place their needs above my own” (Department of the Army, n.d., para. 2). While memorizing and reciting the creed is respectable, a true measure of leadership is embodying the creed by setting a positive example and being a role model. Leaders who love their subordinates, take the time to learn their Soldiers' needs and, through acts of love, place them above their own needs, embody the NCO Creed.

Conclusion

Leadership and love are terms that are intertwined and synonymous with one another. Love is congruent with the Army Values, leadership models, and creeds; therefore, great leaders must embody the concept of love and practically apply it throughout their career by exercising patience, kindness and humility, and commitment to their organization, to their team, and to themselves. So, what does love have to do with leadership? It has everything to do with being a consummate professional who takes care of his or her subordinates. Don’t just love what you do. Also love those you lead. Leave a legacy worth remembering. ■

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