



Leadership and management aren't optional. Together, they form the foundation of any successful organization. Management ensures resources are used efficiently, while leadership drives action, motivation, and adaptability. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Scott Evans)

# Striking a Balance

## A Leader's Perspective

*By Command Sgt. Maj. Charles D. "Doug" Walker*

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**W**hat follows is a response to a previous article by Kevin S. Rasins, the author's former Soldier. Then a staff sergeant and Supply Support Activity (SSA) NCOIC, Rasins published [Striking a Balance: Leadership Versus Management in the Modern Army](#) with the *NCO Journal* in February.

The article *Striking a Balance: Leadership Versus Management in the Modern Army* — written by an outstanding NCO at the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) — discusses a crucial issue: the interplay between leadership and management in the Army. As leaders, we must use both skill sets, and it's essential to foster a culture that values and develops them both.

Leadership and management aren't optional.

Together, they form the foundation of any successful organization. Management ensures resources are used efficiently, while leadership drives action, motivation, and adaptability. In the Army, promotion is earned by proving mastery in both areas: managing personnel and assets while leading with conviction.

Leaders must be able to manage time. This is perhaps the most critical asset, separating effective leaders from the rest. Leaders who can't do it won't be effective. Time management and prioritizing a unit's focus are the hallmarks of great leaders. Everything else follows if you can master this skill.

At my level, effective leadership hinges on making the most of the time available. The trick isn't in managing

individual tasks but prioritizing organizational initiatives and empowering the team to execute efficiently, allowing senior leaders to focus on strategic objectives.

Those who excel at both shape the future of the force, while others remain reactionary to problems as they arise. The Army demands leaders who can strategize, motivate, and execute. Anything less weakens the force.

## Leadership and Management: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Leadership and management aren't mutually exclusive. They are closely intertwined. Every effective leader must possess a strong management base, which will become an absolute necessity as they mature through the ranks.

However, these skills alone are insufficient. True organizational leaders possess sound management and leadership qualities. They motivate, inspire, and provide purpose and direction. They understand leadership is more than just managing tasks, organizing resources, or planning operations.

They must connect with Soldiers, understand their needs, and foster a shared sense of purpose. I attempt to do this for the senior enlisted in the division.

I've seen what happens when leaders rise through the ranks based on leadership qualities, without the

management skills necessary to run an organization or troops effectively. Poor supervisors who get promoted solely for their leadership can create inefficiencies, failing to keep systems and processes running as expected.

There's a reason we have first sergeants, master sergeants, and command sergeants major. These roles exist to provide structure, oversight, and leadership across the Army. Not everyone is cut out for higher-level leadership. Those who truly excel achieve success through their direct actions and activities.

## Addressing the Perceived Imbalance

Rasins' *Striking a Balance* article makes a valid point about Army culture traditionally emphasizing leadership over management. While inspiring leadership is crucial, we must not undervalue the importance of solid management. Poor management can hinder a leader's effectiveness, regardless of their charisma or leadership qualities.

For junior and mid-level NCOs, stress management skills are crucial for promotion and unit readiness. Their ability to manage daily operations, resources, and Soldier well-being is acutely visible. From my experience, these foundational management skills are not just important, they are an absolute prerequisite for effective leadership and career progression. Without them, building credibility and ensuring efficiency at tactical levels



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becomes a significant struggle.

However, from the lens of a division command sergeant major, leadership must take precedence over management. I'm not operating at the micro level, where tasks need to be individually assigned and monitored. That's platoon-level management.

With 17,000 Soldiers (and nearly 30,000 when accounting for the entire installation), my role is to assist in steering the ship, setting direction, and ensuring alignment. It's about checking on learning, conducting quality assessments, and getting a pulse on the organization.

Leadership drives success at the organizational level far more than management does. This is something I want young and aspiring leaders to take away: You must understand what's required at each echelon of leadership.

Rasins' article questions how we romanticize leadership. He writes, "The Army often emphasizes leadership over management in professional development, which can have significant consequences" (Rasins, 2024, para. 3). At other points, the article notes where managerial skills supersede leadership.

The bottom line is leadership in the Army isn't just encouraged — it's demanded. At every level, from junior leaders to senior commanders, the ability to encourage, provide direction, and drive mission success is nonnegotiable.

While management plays a role, it's never enough on its own. A leader who can efficiently track logistics or plan training but can't motivate troops when it matters the most is useless — especially in combat. Not all Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) are combat arms, but that's never an excuse. We are Soldiers, and every Soldier needs to have the warrior's mindset.

Yes, certain occupations may require a stronger focus on managerial skills, but leadership remains the backbone of military operations. The Army doesn't just create managers — it builds leaders who own the fight, take responsibility for their teams, and make decisions under pressure. That's why leadership isn't just a buzzword. It's the defining characteristic of those who shape the battlespace and lead Soldiers into the unknown.

Are there great managers in the ranks? Absolutely. But the Army values leaders above all because combat doesn't wait for logistics, resources, or training plans. The people who change the course of battle are the ones who understand how to inspire others, drive decisions, and execute without hesitation. That's why leadership will always be the priority in building the next generation of warriors.



Leadership drives success at the organizational level far more than management does. This is something I want young and aspiring leaders to take away: You must understand what's required at each echelon of leadership. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Arthur M. Wright)

## We Are Not Transactional

Here's the key difference I've seen — something I wish more folks understood: The Army isn't a transactional organization. That's where we fundamentally diverge from the corporate world. In corporate America, leadership often overlaps with management.

Results are measured in quarterly reports, meetings are tied to performance metrics, and success gets evaluated in numbers. It's structured and efficient — but also largely impersonal. You can manage a team without ever truly leading it. Sometimes, this happens in the Army, too.

That transactional model doesn't cut it here. Army leadership is personal. It's immersive. You don't just check boxes — you check on your people. You build trust, lead by example, and push through adversity knowing that lives — not just profits — are on the line.

Management still matters, yes. But in our world, it's leadership that tips the scales when it matters the most.

## Developing Well-Rounded Leaders

I've always been a firm believer in data-driven leadership. At the division level, decisions must be informed by hard facts, not gut instincts. Data allows me to track trends, assess effectiveness, and refine processes to ensure we operate at peak efficiency. Without it, leadership becomes reactive instead of proactive.

One of the first things I focused on when assuming responsibility was establishing strong systems and processes. Early on, I spent a significant amount of time getting things structured, in my own vision, so operations could run smoothly. Once those foundational systems were in place, I was able to shift my focus toward areas more critical to our combat mission.

A major part of leadership is talent management —



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placing the right people in the right positions. If NCOs lack strong management skills, it's often a sign they don't fully understand their role. In those cases, ensuring the right NCOs are placed in positions where they can refine and manage systems effectively is crucial. Leaders who lack management skills should be reassigned to roles that better align with their strengths.

I've also learned that not everyone develops both leadership and management skills equally. Some excel at inspiring and motivating others, while others struggle with the organizational side of leadership. But if an NCO can't manage fundamental tasks like organizational readiness, their weaknesses will catch up to them and prevent career progression.

This is what I've learned through experience. Effective leadership in the Army is about ensuring the right people are in the right positions, fostering professional growth, and getting systems to run efficiently so we can focus on what matters — leading Soldiers and dominating in ground combat.

At the division level, many staff members step into roles they've never performed before. Developing a professional staff requires a persistent approach to ensure they gain the necessary expertise.

Leadership isn't just about commanding troops. It's about shaping the individuals around you into competent professionals so they can replace you one day.

Leaders are only as strong as their team. Stacking the right personnel around me has been key to my success.

## The Importance of Presence and Communication

As we grow as leaders, we have choices. Some include where you want to be as a leader and how you want to communicate with your formations.

Leadership is about presence, action, and outcomes.

Leaders who burrow in on meetings and emails or avoid friction points will fail when it counts.

True leadership demands presence within formations. Those who spend more time “up and out” rather than “down and in” are often disconnected from their Soldiers and ineffective in leading at lower levels.

One of the biggest problems is leading from behind a desk. Overreliance on email and digital communication prevents leaders from getting a pulse on their units, leading to ineffective oversight and a lack of connection with troops. Digital tools have their place, but leadership cannot be outsourced to digital platforms or mass emails.

Communication must be direct and face-to-face when possible. Avoiding uncomfortable conversations by hiding behind a computer screen erodes trust and can create frustration in the formation. Frankly, it comes across as weak and immature.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, I support Rasins' position, but from a senior leader's perspective. The distinction between managers and leaders is clear. While managers ensure operational efficiency, leaders must be directly involved — they lead through presence, motivation, and example.

If there's one takeaway from this article, let it be this: *Be present, and use your time wisely.*

Presence and time management aren't just leadership buzzwords — they're foundational principles. Being present is one of the defining traits of effective leadership. It means showing up, being hands on, and proving to your Soldiers that their time matters just as much as yours.

If you're asking them to complete tasks, train hard, and execute missions, then you need to be cold when they're cold, dirty when they're dirty, and hungry when

they're hungry. Leadership is a shared experience.

But presence doesn't only apply in the field or under stress. It's also about being there when your Soldiers need support — personally or professionally. Leadership happens in conversations, collaboration, and in the quiet moments of connection. We must return to the fundamentals: real relationships and face-to-face communication.

Presence demands time — both yours and theirs. That's why time management is critical. Know where your time goes. Use it intentionally.

Time is a currency that applies on and off duty. Invest it in developing yourself and others. Use it to plan, prioritize, and prepare.

Make time for your family, your health, and your interests. When you take care of yourself, you show up better — and that positively impacts all around you. ■

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## References

Rasins, K. (2025). Striking a Balance: Leadership Versus Management in the Modern Army. *NCO Journal*, 1-5.

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2025/February/Striking-a-Balance>

### Sidebar: Author's Note

I would like to congratulate Kevin S. Rasins on the publication of *Striking a Balance: Leadership Versus Management in the Modern Army* and its selection as a Chief of Staff of the Army reading recommendation. That honor stands as a testament to his perspective, clarity, insight, and relevance. His work exemplifies the power of the written word to shape professional dialogue and inspire growth across the force.

As we continue to support initiatives like the Harding Project (an Army Chief of Staff initiative aimed at developing professional writing across the force), let this serve as a call to action for Soldiers at every echelon. Your voice matters. Seek out the issues that challenge your formation, reflect on your experiences, and contribute to the Army's intellectual readiness by writing, sharing, and engaging in meaningful discourse.

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**Command Sgt. Maj. Charles D. Walker** is command sergeant major of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1998 as an infantryman. During his 25-year career, he served in various assignments across Special Operations Command and XVIII Airborne Corps, including the 75th Ranger Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), 3rd Infantry Division and the Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG). He has served in every enlisted leadership position from fire team leader to division command sergeant major. Walker is currently working on his bachelor's degree in organizational leadership from the University of Oklahoma.



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