

What Makes a Good Leader?

by Capt. Cleo "Buck" Buxton



It is my contention that five percent of people are leaders for the right, five percent are leaders for the wrong, and the other ninety percent will follow whoever is the most persuasive.

The more an issue involves implications of righteousness and morality, the more mankind is slanted towards unrighteousness because of the deceitfulness of the human heart. Therefore, leadership for righteous issues must be that much more positive and compelling if it is to bring a significant number of the ninety percent to the righteous side.

In the military, officers must possess true leadership qualities or their units will never accomplish anything. In issues of great moral importance, which will eventually determine the real strength of any unit, officers must exercise leadership that will command respect and admiration.

In our world today, with its conflicting interests and ideologies, our greatest need is for righteous leaders. Let's address the issue: What makes a leader?

Decisiveness

The foremost leadership quality is **decisiveness**. Leaders must be able to weigh various courses of action quickly, bring into play their own experiences and knowledge, and then choose the right decision. A leader sees the big picture, never becoming enmeshed in the details.

On his first morning of commanding the British Eighth Army near the Tobruk desert, General Bernhard Montgomery was awakened by an officer giving him the morning situation report. The general did not have any pleasant words for the officer, and told him that he never wanted to be bothered with such details again. The chief of staff could tell him anything really important, and his task as commanding general was to be concerned with the overall picture and have a clear mind to reason out the best battle strategy.

Assuming Risks and Responsibilities

Leaders must be willing to assume the responsibility and risks involved in decision making. They must have initiative and be self-starting, always looking for opportunities where they can be of help.

Many times, we try not to offend anyone or leave the main stream of activity and thought. However, in Christian matters, true leaders are willing to stand alone, if need be, to uphold their convictions.

Defined Goals, Planned Actions

Leaders must have clearly defined goals and definite plans of action. Equally important, they must communicate goals clearly to those who follow them. The average soldier will do what a leader want them to if leaders communicate their desires clearly.

Leaders must have confidence and faith in the mission and be willing to give themselves to it with a wholeheartedness which inspires confident in their leadership and the mission.

As a young lieutenant in WW2, I became involved in a situation which showed me the necessity of taking action. The camp I was in quickly moved men overseas to the battle areas, and there was great tension about the outcome of the war. Many men were away from home for the first time. The posts were still racially segregated in those days, and late one Sunday afternoon an altercation between white and black soldiers started over who had access to a post exchange. Shortly, with the MPs trying to break up the fight, shots rang out.

Word spread quickly that there was a race riot. We could hear sporadic firing, and the ribald remarks and the lack of respect for the value of a man's life among other officers amazed me. They were getting out their pistols, apparently to bring vengeance upon the black soldiers. It may have been only talk, but it seemed the intent was there.

It was twilight when I reached the largest concentration of soldiers and officers. All order had broken down, and there was talk about inflicting punishment on the black soldiers. The scene was one of reckless abandonment as white men moved into the segregated black area, shooting at anything that might be a target. There were other officers near me, some of them a number of ranks above me, but they seemed either impassive or were urging more ammunition on anyone who would take it. I had on fatigues and wore moccasins on my feet as I had been reading and lounging – I wore no rank insignia, which was probably just as well.

I stepped to the center of the crowd and ordered the men handing out ammunition to stop immediately. I asked those with bandoliers to surrender them. Then I called for six men from the crowd to see that all men were disarmed and the situation returned to order. Order was restored, but not before we turned back several companies of men who were being led by some of their officers. We found that several men had already been killed.

All that is necessary for the forces of evil to triumph in the world is for enough good men to do nothing.

Knowing People

Successful leaders must understand human nature and be a good judge of character. You must be loyal to those you lead, and they in turn will be loyal to you – cooperation is essential. A good leader has learned first to be a good follower.

Effective Christian leaders will have a deep love for the people with whom they work and a humbleness of heart, recognizing that God knows each of us thoroughly, and loves us in spite of what He knows.

Leaders will be considerate and kind to offenders and set them back on course. If they persist in the offense, it is up to leaders to use their power to bring the person back into line. We recognize that God must continually do that with all humans, and thus Christian leaders are gracious to the offender without being soft or coddling.

As leaders, you must have an accurate estimate of your own abilities. Paul entreats us in Romans 12:3, "...do not be conceited, or think too highly of yourself."

If we are weak in certain areas, we should strive to build those areas up. Mature Christians can help us overcome our weaknesses by pointing out an alternate course of action which we have failed to see. There is no place for arrogance, selfishness, or a holier-than-thou attitude in a leader.

Hard Work

By very definition, leaders must be willing to work hard. They must be persevering and self-disciplining in order to achieve their aims. A lazy person can hardly be a leader.

Christian leaders do not become such overnight, in spite of what we sometimes think. It takes long training and experiences in different situations, including making mistakes and being set back on the right path again. Improving our powers of perception by observation and by counsel from the mature is part of being becoming a leader. It takes a willingness to be trained thoroughly by God. Our tendency is to be hasty and fail to "wait on the Lord."

We must also learn to value the abilities of everyone, making the most of each person's talents, limited though they may be. Leaders should consistently express appreciation to people for their work so they are encouraged to work more diligently.

Of all the factors involved in Christian leadership the most important is to be an example to the people you lead. If you express confidence and yield to the Lord God in all you do, your life will draw others to Jesus Christ. If there is nothing in our lives that is different, there is little reason for others to want to know and follow our God.

- The author, Cleo "Buck" Buxton, was an infantry officer in WW2 who earned multiple decorations on the front lines. He is believed to have seen more combat duty than the vast majority of U.S. army officers in WW2, experiencing 2 ½ years of infantry combat. In 1972 he founded the Association for Christian Conferences, Teaching, and Service. Through the

encouragement of ACCTS, military Christians around the world have been strengthened and encouraged to live for Christ in their nations' armed forces.

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