

Leadership Secrets of the Australian Army

Book contents

Prologue

As my wife and I pitched in to contribute to a hastily-formed community leadership group in our devastated home village of Marysville following Black Saturday 2009, I found myself having fresh and vital insights into the leadership process.

Chapter 1: Leadership we can believe in

This book is based on more than half a century's observation and study of leadership practice and thinking. While its focus is on the ground forces—the Army—it does not neglect the Navy and the Air Force.

Although not everything about military leadership is perfect, the principles that guide its practice at all levels are fundamentally sound.

Chapter 2: Leadership, culture and context

The cultural factors that shaped mainstream Australia from the early days of the colony resulted in a society with a strong preference for 'no-BS' leadership from *Captain-Coach* leaders skilled in collaboration as well as problem-solving: leaders who could be relied on to both do the right thing and to do it right.

These principles and their associated practices have personified Australian military leadership across the last century. And as armed conflict and related operations grew increasingly dependent on team effectiveness, often at the lowest levels, such an approach became a priceless capability asset.

Chapter 3: Looking at leadership

Many civilians mistakenly attribute the military's ability to get things done smoothly and effectively to top-down direction and strict discipline. However, those familiar with the military know that this is essentially due to an approach by which leaders operate as *catalysts* than as *controllers*.

They do so within an organisational form known as 'networked hierarchy', in which leaders act as focal agents oriented to facilitating and empowering individual and team performance.

Chapter 4: A leader first: the military leadership ethos

Military leaders are guided by a service-oriented ethos that has strong moral as well as practical roots.

This chapter examines a number of examples of this ethos in action. These include the experiences of seven not-so-little Australians: a tiny but representative handful of the young men who took on the challenge of officership after being called up for national service in the late 1960s and early '70s, and whose lives were significantly shaped by the experience.

Chapter 5: Of us, for us, with us: Introduction to the 3Rs of leadership

This chapter introduces a model that captures the essence of the Captain-Coach style introduced in Chapter 2. It is built around three main types of leadership activities: *Representing, Relating and Running the team.*

The 3Rs concept evolved from my experiences in my local community after the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires.

Chapter 6: Representing: The role model

In conditions of uncertainty or risk, we look for someone who seems to be worth following: a person with the competence and character to deal with *our* problems and who gives direction and meaning to what *we* do. In short, someone who Represents what the group stands for.

This is achieved by *leading by example* in terms of performance and ethical standards, and by *giving meaning and direction* to the group and its members.

Chapter 7: Relating: The supportive people manager

Team members instinctively trust a leader who Relates to them on a human basis, and makes them feel respected both as an individual and as a colleague.

Far from being a 'touchie-feelie' waste of time, solid interpersonal relationships are essential, particularly for *building individual self-esteem and a sense of agency*, and a *shared sense of identity* as a part of a proud and potent cohesive whole.

Chapter 8: Running the team: The engaging catalyst

Effective leaders Run their teams in ways that help members to *build skills and engagement*, and encourage *open-mindedness and a spirit of continuous improvement.*

Through such processes members come to see their work in 'more-than-just-a-job' terms, and working in that group becomes satisfying and rewarding for its own sake.

Chapter 9: Leadership development: Building an organisation while building its people

The seeds of leadership success need to be planted early and deeply, with the crop replenished according to the seasons. Leadership development should be aimed not just at developing skills but also at appropriate values and a robust and enquiring leader-oriented identity.

The Australian military is particularly strong in its approach to early and mid-career leadership development.

A leadership culture has the same kind of effect on organisational performance as a backswing has in golf. Without a well-practised and reliable golf swing, it is difficult to score consistently well; and without a sound leadership culture, it is difficult for leaders to be consistently effective.

To put it simply: 'It's the backswing, stupid.'

Supporting material

The book has a number of supporting appendices: a glossary of frequently used terms; a summary of the structure of the contemporary military; and an outline of some of the core professional techniques used for decision-making, tasking and communicating. It avoids academic-style referencing within the text itself, with the details of various sources and references given in a 'Notes' section at the end of the book.