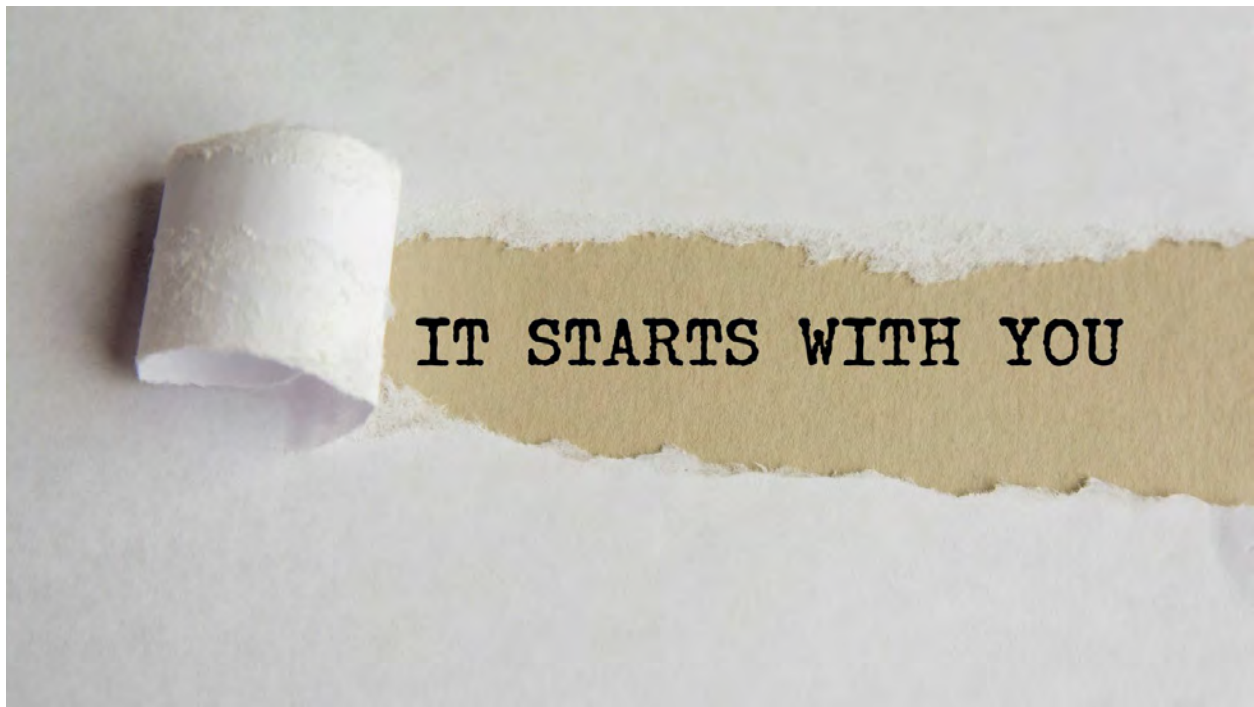


Principles and Traits of Marine Corps Leadership, Part X

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Some people are capable of self-reflection, others are not. One indicator that someone is able to examine himself is that when a mistake is made, the first instinct is to consider how he may have contributed to the problem and to make the proper correction. Usually, people who do not readily examine themselves will find the fault for mistakes anywhere but at home. The ability honestly to examine

oneself is a strength. Not being able, or willing, to do this is a weakness. The Marine Corps leadership principle of employing your command within its capabilities requires of leaders that they are able to identify both strengths and weaknesses in the Marines they lead and to train them in order to improve strengths and strengthen weaknesses.

Anyone who has worked in a job that requires assessing the performance of others, whether as a supervisor in an office or as a teacher assessing the progress of students, knows that one can become better over time at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of people. One understands also that no matter how carefully you try to make objective the methods used for assessment, subjective judgments must be taken. In fact, if we could make thoroughly objective assessments, they would be inaccurate because they couldn't account for such important qualities as insight, intuition, and judgment which are necessary to excellent performance in any field of endeavor. Such qualities can be observed and appreciated, but not quantified. So a Marine leader who seeks to employ a command within its capabilities must be able to perceive and understand the strengths and weaknesses demonstrated by the Marines who are led. Thus, a good way to think about this principle of Marine Corps leadership is with regard to other Marine leadership principles that cast light on it.

The leadership principle of knowing oneself and seeking self-improvement is critical to employing Marines within their capabilities because when one knows himself and works ever to improve, he has an experiential grasp of his own strengths and weaknesses. Weaknesses can be found in one's knowledge, requiring further study over time to improve, and yet some people have a greater capacity for knowledge and its use than do others. Physical limitations may be addressed through practice and exercise, but some people can carry more weight than others, some people can run faster than others, some can run farther than others, some will swim more efficiently, shoot more accurately, and on it goes. Importantly, in order to know oneself, one must be capable of self-reflection, and in order for self-reflection to be profitable, one has to be honest about it. Many people find it distressing to acknowledge some weakness or other, and this can be an impediment to improvement. But when someone honestly assesses his own abilities and performance, seeking to improve, he will recognize self-improvement as it happens and this not only strengthens self-confidence, but it develops also the ability to see strengths and weaknesses in others with insights into how to address them.

If a leader is to employ a command within its capabilities, the leader will be technically and tactically proficient since a leader who knows himself and seeks self-improvement will, as a consequence of this, achieve and maintain technical and tactical proficiency. Certainly, someone who seeks self-improvement and technical competence will

develop such leadership traits as initiative and enthusiasm, and these traits of a leader often inspire in others the desire to develop them in themselves. It is obvious, also, that technical and tactical proficiency are needed as a foundation from which to train others. In the process of training Marines in order to employ them within an ever-expanding capability, a leader must know his Marines and seek their welfare. In the process of learning who someone is, one can get a sense of that person's strengths and weaknesses, and importantly, how he expresses them, which is helpful knowledge when training people to work as a team. This exercise, especially seeking the welfare of Marines in a unit, requires of the leader the trait of unselfishness which also has the effect of building good morale among members of a team.

Poor communication can have a deleterious effect on a unit's overall capability, and so it is important for a leader to keep the unit's personnel informed. What it means to keep people informed will be determined in part by a unit's mission, and of course the leader's ability to communicate tactfully, but doing this as a matter of routine builds a sense of belonging and camaraderie among a team that contributes to successful training and performance. The leadership principle of ensuring that a task is understood, supervised, and accomplished bears directly on the goal of employing a command within its capability since this latter objective will fall under a leader's responsibility to supervise the performance of tasks. Moreover, a leader who maintains good communication within a command and

ensures that tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished will show members of the team that he is dependable as a leader.

The leadership principle of developing a sense of responsibility among subordinates has multiple effects since Marines, or anyone else, possessed of a sense of responsibility owns that sense as a personal property aimed at the success of the organization. People who sense responsibility to the organization sense it toward the mission and toward others in the organization. This will express itself first in efforts at self-improvement which may consciously be directed, for example, at improving technical proficiency, but the effort in this direction brings with it a kind of personal improvement owing to the exercise of initiative that in turn refines and clarifies one's sense of responsibility to the organization. This can have the effect of improving relationships among team members, thus enhancing the quality of communication and cooperation within a unit and its capability to complete its mission.

We can say, therefore, that employing a command within its capabilities requires of a leader not only to ensure the command has the resources and equipment needed for a mission, but also that a leader develop and train the Marines of the unit in part by developing within himself the traits of a Marine leader, expressing those traits in the skillful application of the principles of Marine Corps leadership.

At first sight, one might miss the connection between the leadership principle of employing a command within its capabilities

and the leadership trait of unselfishness, but the trait aids the implementation of the principle. In discussions of unselfishness in leadership one encounters elements like finishing a task rather than assigning it to someone else, listening to the thoughts of team members on how better to accomplish the mission, and importantly, taking responsibility for shortcomings within the team and providing training focused on the causes of mistakes in performance. At its essence, unselfishness in a leader is seen when the leader places the needs of Marines in the unit above his own, and this requires communication and the ability to listen to what Marines are saying. Importantly, when people listen carefully in discussion with others, a result of this is that they come better to understand one another and this improves all aspects of a unit's operation, including those affected by the personalities and domestic situations of team members.

At this point in our consideration of the principles and traits of Marine Corps leadership it becomes clear how these fit together one with another, and how they re-enforce each other. When one studies any kind of activity or undertaking with enough care, he can detect principles inherent in the activity that lead to achievement of the goals of the activity when applied skillfully. The important thing here is to understand what it is to apply a principle "skillfully." Skill in applying a principle to an activity requires that the person acting is able to see how the particular circumstances in which he is acting indicate how the principle should be employed. Applying principles with skill is one of the meanings of the word "virtue," since the development of skill in

applying a principle strengthens one's ability to analyze changing situations and circumstances. This is how one develops the virtue of prudence, or practical wisdom, that guides someone in such a way that that person consistently acts properly according to the situation he is in. In order to do this, one has to be able to examine himself honestly and to seek always to improve.