

The Habits of an Ethical Commander:
A values-based model for the Irregular War fighter in the 21st Century.

Chaplain Maurice A. Buford

Marine Corps University

maurice.buford@usmc.mil

757.513.4737

Abstract

Engaging in irregular warfare can potentially create a new set of ethical challenges. Such issues can have negative ramifications on the overall mission if not proactively addressed. Since winning the hearts and minds of the international locals is a centerpiece of today's engagements, it would behoove emerging leaders to embrace empirical habits to mitigate moral lapses that consequently energize the opposition's endeavors. This qualitative study interviews 52 mid to senior level commanders and gleans their best ethical practices when they were in command. Such data is synthesized with the literature on irregular warfare and leadership to devise a values-based model for the Irregular War fighter in the 21st Century.

One can argue that irregular warfare in the 21st century has a unique set of ethical challenges that warrants an innovative model to help emerging commanders to proactively win in the boardroom as well as the battlefield. A cursory review of the literature, as an example, suggests that when a leader's morals are skewed or motivated by self-centeredness, career derailment and or national shame becomes the order of the day (McMaster, 1997; Peers, 1979). Though mishaps like My Lai and the Rwandan Genocide have become the cornerstone of various military case studies to defuse future incidents, the questions become, "What are the top military ethical challenges for commanders today, how can we best prepare our leaders to sidestep such moral land mines for the sake of the greater mission and is it possible to command without getting one's hands dirty?"

This study endeavors to resolve the above research questions in several ways. First, a brief literature review is delineated on irregular warfare, leadership, and derailment. This process outlines several common denominators on how as well as why some personalities have moral meltdowns. Second, the limited empirical work on evaluating military commanders' ethical intelligence is brought to the reader's attention. Third, the research design of this work is outlined. Fourth, the data is analyzed and an inference for command is discussed. This study concludes with a forthright discussion on the leadership ethics of irregular war fighting in the 21st century, limitations of the paper are highlighted and recommendations for future research are framed.

Irregular warfare

The military trends of the moment suggest that irregular warfare will be amongst us for a while. According to the executive summary of the 2007 Joint Operating Concept, irregular

warfare (IW) can be defined as “a violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.”

Coons and Harned (2009) elaborate on the realities of IW by asserting that our nation will be confronted with violent extremism until 2020. During this timeframe, opponents will more than likely employ a strategy of physical, economic, and psychological subversion, attrition, and exhaustion to undermine and erode the power, influence, and will of the United States and its strategic partners (p. 97). Moreover, Coons and Harned suggest that the adversary’s new found “warfare of choice” is to fight the United States among the people. This position, they contend, is an obvious paradigm shift that limits the utilization of conventional applications of our military power (p.97).

Coons and Harned (2009) conclude their manuscript by affirming the five key themes of the 2006 Deputy Secretary of Defense IW Roadmap:

- Transforming the way Department of Defense (DOD) manages its military and civilian personnel to meet IW operational requirements;
- Rebalancing general purpose force (GPF) capabilities and capacity to conduct long-duration counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT) operations;
- Increasing special operations force capability and capacity in two classified mission areas and to meet SOF air mobility requirements;
- Increase Department of Defense capability and capacity to conduct counter-network operations;
- Redesign joint and service military and civilian education and individual and unit training for the conduct and support of IW.

The above strategic premises seem to be an accurate response to IW. However, such guidance omits an ethical framework that would prepare leadership to engage in the realities of 21st century war fighting.

The Other Side of Leadership

As the global community actively watches how the DOD employs the IW roadmap in today's context, it is imperative to assure that we have the right commanders on the bus and in the right seats (Collins, 2001). The question becomes, what is meant by the right commanders? The "right commanders" are defined for this study as those leaders that have modeled, inspired and developed both the "tough" and "soft" skills associated with influencing troops in combat. As we fight to "win the hearts and minds" of internationals, the counsel of Goleman (1998) holds true. He states that, "We are being judged by a new yardstick; not just how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also how well we handle ourselves and each other."

Tough Skills	Soft Skills
Intelligence	Self-Awareness
Analytical	Self-Regulation
Technical	Ethical
Determination	Self-Motivation
Rigor	Empathy
Vision	Social Skill

Table I Tough v.s. Soft skills of leadership based on Goleman's (2000) work

In light of the above, one can argue that it is no longer just about being the most competent commander but rather being the most complete. It must be noted at this point the etymology of the word integrity is derived from the Latin *integer*. *Integer* has the connotation of "wholeness" and being "complete." Thus, commanders who are whole or complete (i.e. epitomize both the tough and soft sides of leadership) may have a greater ethical reputation than their peers.

Table I depicts the two skill sets of leadership as coined by Goleman (2000). The “tough” side of leadership often focuses upon a person’s intelligence, analytical, technical abilities, and determination, rigor, and vision. To this end, most career promotions and strategic plans to date (to include the 2006 Deputy Secretary of Defense IW Roadmap), are often undergirded by such competencies. This motif becomes problematic when highly skilled leaders begin to break a set of moral principles. Once this pattern is established, the nation’s image becomes tarnished, credibility diminishes and the perpetrator suffers moral injury.

The often overlooked aspect of leadership is known as the “soft” side. As shown on table I, there are six elements affiliated with this construct. First, self-awareness involves people being attuned to inner signals and recognizing how their feelings affect them and their job performance (Goleman’s et al., 2002). Second, self-regulation facilitates emotional stability and information processing in difficult, stressful situations, and it helps leaders maintain their own optimism and enthusiasm about a project or mission in the face of obstacles and setbacks” (Yulk, 2002, p. 197). Riggio, Murphy and Pirozzolo (2002) maintain that this competency allows a leader to be more understanding to followers without criticism and defensiveness.

Third, ethics can be defined as those personal, freely chosen, and consciously adopted beliefs, principles, or notions of what is right and wrong, how I ought to live my life, and more importantly, how I should treat other people (Larimer, 1997, p. 32). Fourth, self-motivation involves a leader’s ability to invoke authentic personal confidence and enthusiasm to achieve objectives. Fifth, Abraham (1999, p. 1) states that, “Empathy forms the cornerstone of emotional appraisal through gauging of feelings in others, re-experiencing those feelings, and as a result, choosing socially adaptive responses.”

Finally, Yulk (2002) contends that social competency is the ability to understand the feelings, attitudes, and motives of others from what they say and do. Additionally, social skills include one's capability to communicate clearly and effectively. Moreover, social skills comprise a leader's ability to establish effective and cooperative relationships (tact, diplomacy, listening skills, knowledge about acceptable behavior).

To reiterate a previous point, integrity is about walking in wholeness or being complete. To train our commanders on the "tough" side of leadership only in the face 21st century warfare is a recipe for future Abu Ghraibs. Such a pathway is like driving a car with only two tires. In order to increase speed, we must also equip commanders with the "soft" side of warfare leadership.

Derailment

The lack of a holistic approach (integrity) to influencing can quickly short-circuit one's career. Van Velsor and Leslie (1995) refer to this construct as derailment. They suggest that, "A derailed executive is one who, having reached the general manager level, finds that there is little chance of future advancement due to a misfit between job requirements and personal skills. The executive is either plateaued or leaves the organization altogether. Derailment in one company, however, does not permanently end a manager's career. Those who leave their organization because they resign, are fired, or take early retirement often go on to either start their own companies or join other firms where they are successful (p.62)."

Despite the litany of high visible cases of corporate issues with management, the literature is relatively limited with regards to management derailment. To illustrate, Lombardo et al. (1988) argues that leadership derailment on average costs an entity in excess of \$500,000 per

incident. Lombardo and Eichinger's (2004) research with 1000 managers and leaders over a 2-year period found that those with internal character or personal flaws were more likely to derail. Benson's (2006) work found that leaders with a higher level of emotional stability (i.e. EI) experienced lower rate of derailment episodes than those with low emotional stability.

Moreover, McCall and Lombardo's (1983) study with executives that derailed unearthed several traits. They discovered that leaders that experienced moral injury were often:

- Insensitive to others (due to past hurts)
- Aloof (detached did not build a team of rivals)
- Cold (known for beating up their team)
- Arrogant (all about me)
- Betrayal of trust (if it would advance their career)
- Overly ambitious (build their kingdoms not build their people)
- Miscellaneous skill deficiencies (was not complete)
- Burned out (this could relate to combat stress for the military)

Additionally, Zenger and Folkman (2002) found that leaders that derail had five common fatal flaws: (1) inability to learn from mistakes, (2) a lack of core interpersonal skills and competencies, (3) the lack of openness to new and different ideas, (4) the lack of accountability and (5) the lack of initiative.

The latest research of Collins (2009) reports similar findings from those that failed from a good to great status. Collins discovered that the mighty fall not overnight but rather through a litany of subtle stages. The first stage was the hubris born of success. At this place a leader asserts an arrogant sense of entitlement. The second stage is described as the undisciplined pursuit of more. In other words, the leader no longer keeps the main thing the main thing.

The third phase is referred to as the denial of risk and peril. Typically, the leadership ignores sound feedback and presses forward based upon their own mindset. The fourth level is known as grasping for salvation. At this place the leader desperately begins to reach out for help.

The final step is the capitulation to irrelevance or death. In the context of command, one can argue, humiliation, relief of command and mission setback is the order of the day. Though this overview of derailment gives the reader a cursory understanding of the literature, it must be noted that no research to date has been conducted with military commanders.

Research Questions

The ethical omission of the 2006 IW Roadmap, the one-sided leadership development motif of corporate America (i.e. the hard side only) and the lack of empirical studies on military commanders mandates a response to the following research questions:

R1: What are the top military ethical challenges for commanders today?

R2: How can we best prepare our leaders to side step such moral land mines for the sake of the greater mission?

R3: But what do you hope...Do you think you can govern (command) without getting your hands dirty?

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore the above research questions for a period of one month. More specifically, through a convenience sample of 52 mid to senior level military commanders, these leaders were asked about demographical information and the ensuing questions through a confidential website – Survey Monkey. They were asked:

(1) How do you define ethics?

(2) While in command please describe your top ethical challenges?

(3) What methods did you deploy to overcome such ethical challenges?

(4) In hindsight, would you have handled such issues differently? Explain.

- (5) How did/do you specifically cultivate your own sense of ethics as well as an ethical command climate?
- (6) What practical advice would you offer to new commanders to win ethically?
- (7) In your opinion is it ever ethically acceptable to do something unethical for the greater good of the team (i.e. lie, steal or cheat IF such an action will help others avoid serious personal harm)?

Findings

The demographical data of the study was straight forward and clear. Of the participants 76.9 % reported being white, 11.5% black, 7.7% Hispanic, 3.8% Asian and 3.8% reported other. 96.2 % of the sampling was male and 3.8% female. Regarding the demographics of rank, 46.2% reported being O-4 to O-5, 38.5% were within the rank category of O-6 to O-7, 11.5 % were O-8 to O-10 and 3.8% reported their rank as “other.”

When asked the question about number of years of command experience, it was diverse. To illustrate, 48% reported being in command 1 – 2 times, 24% reported 3 – 4 times, 12% indicated they were in command 5 – 6 times and 12% reported being in command 10 or more times. Additionally, the data revealed that only 3.8% of the sample was in the Navy, 57.7 % in the Marine Corp and 38.5 % in the Coast Guard.

The qualitative data of this work was abstracted by utilizing Tesch’s (1990) eight-point plan for coding procedures for data analysis. The points include: (1) Getting a sense of the whole by carefully reading all of the transcriptions. (2) Arbitrarily picking an interview and ask, “What is this about?” Write the substantive response in the margin. (3) At the point of completing several participants make a list of all topics. (4) Take this list and go back to the data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and see whether new categories surface. (5) Find the most descriptive

wording for your topics and turn them into categories. (6) Make the final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes. (7) Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis. (8) Recode data if necessary.

Defining Ethics

In light of Tesch’s (1990) guidance, five general categories emerged regarding the question, “how do you define ethics.” The themes of this inquiry include:

Percentage of sample	Sample’s Definitions	Researcher’s interpretation
38.5 %	Standards of right & wrong as defined by the organization.	Here the leaders placed the ethical onus on the agency.
27%	Exercising moral principles to make the decisions and do the correct thing when no one is watching.	Here the leaders seemingly acknowledges & summons a set of internal virtues to make a tough call.
19.2%	Doing the right thing	The leaders imply there are categorical imperatives in every situation.
11.5%	Personal ideology that is shaped by one’s respective context to guide decision-making in gray areas	The leaders rely on a set of logical experiences to help them navigate through ambiguity.
.03%	Conforming to the right thing of the organization until the right no longer conforms to your set of principles.	The leaders within this framework seem to be in a conflicted ethical position.

Table II Ethical Definitions of a sample of Commanders

As depicted in Table II, the commanders in this sample have a diverse understanding of the term ethics. The majority or 38.5% framed ethics as standards of right & wrong as defined by the organization. From the essence of some of the comments, it was as if these commanders placed the ethical onus directly upon the agency. In other words, they viewed right and wrong in

accordance with various value statements of their organizations (i.e. honor, courage and commitment).

The second dominant classification, 27%, was that of exercising moral principles to make decisions and do the correct thing when no one is watching. An inference can be made that leaders of this sample seemingly acknowledge and summon a set of internal virtues to make a tough call. The least popular yet interesting categorization is that of “conforming to the right thing of the organization until the right no longer conforms to your set of principles.” The sentiment behind such framing suggests that such leaders were in a conflicted ethical place.

Top Ethical Challenges

With regard to the question of top ethical challenges, the commanders in this study delineated six themes. The primary theme revolved around the notion of “the judgment factor.” Some of the issues associated with this topic include (a) exercising command combat restraint in the face of unethical methods of the opposition that may have taken the life of a Marine. (b) Making those tough calls (typically the lesser of two evils) in a limited timeframe and being able to deal with the consequences of the second and third order of effects. (c) Supporting their perception of flawed policy and aligning personal values with that of the organization. (e) Assuring that the entire team is treated with fairness.

The second leading ethical challenge of this study involved budgetary practices. More specifically, 19% reported being challenged with some form of fiscal allure. For example, many indicated that they were constantly being offered gifts from internationals and locals. The acceptance of such gifts could be problematic if not handled with caution. Next, the commanders indicate that poor accountability frames placed the command in compromising

positions. Finally, the participants indicate that misuse of governmental property was cause for concern.

Percentage of sample	Themes	Issues
33.4 %	The Judgment Factor	Exercising combat restraint, choosing between the lesser of two evils, supporting flawed policy and aligning personal values with that of the entity, fairness in treatment of entire team.
19%	Budget Practices	Receiving of gifts, executing the budget in an ethical manner and proper usage of governmental property.
14.2%	Maintaining an Ethical Command Climate	Proportionality issues, empowering the command to provide feedback swiftly, proper usage of power.
14.2%	Sexual misconduct	Cases of rape, relieving leaders of command due to this issue and all that comes with it.
14.2%	Human Resource Issues	Alcohol related issues, drugs, suicide, EO issues and conduct unbecoming.
5. %	Dissent	Speaking out against unethical practice of seniors.

Table III Top Ethical Challenges from a sample of Commanders

The least popular (5%) ethical challenge as indicated in table III was the deployment of dissent. At this place a small portion of the sample report having to “go to bat for their team by

speaking out against the unethical conduct of seniors.” Such an act clearly requires courage, the right delivery as well as the correct timing.

Habits of an Ethical Commander

The questions of overcoming ethical challenges, cultivating personal / command ethical climate and practical advice to new commanders are outlined in this section. The logic behind this step is that such themes are overlapping with their feedback. As shown in table IV, the first habit of an ethical commander is to lead by example. Maxwell (2001) contends that everything rises and falls on leadership. Thus, if there is to be any boardroom or battlefield ethical success, the participants of this study recommend taking care of your people first. This assertion aligns with the finding of Hickman’s (2002) study of followers. Hickman’s research showed that followers wanted their leaders to be less of a hero and more of a hero-maker. Moreover, the commanders recommend modeling the way in all things. Some of the actual comments include, “let your people see you eat last... close the say/do gap and consume alcohol in moderation... When your people see this they will not want to let you down.”

Habit 2 - The CURE Factor

The second habit of an ethical Commander is to communicate, understand, reinforce the rules without partiality and establish order (C.U.R.E). The CURE factor is largely built on the theory of communication. Littejohn and Foss (2005) argue that framing communication to a single definition can be problematic and should be evaluated based on how well it helps scholars answer the questions they are investigating. For purposes of this manuscript, communication can be defined as the transmission of information within several categories – (a) communication as information transfer, (b) communication as transactional process, (c) communication as strategic

control and (d) communication as a balance of creativity and constraint (Berelson and Steiner, 1964; Eisenberg, Goodall & Tretheway, 2006).

According to the sage of commanders in this study, there is a positive relationship of employing the CURE factor and an ethical command. More specifically, the overwhelming recommendation of this point was that commanders should quickly, aggressively, and constantly articulate their command philosophy up and down the chain of command. Such communication will reduce ambiguity and give their team a standard to live up to.

The second aspect of the CURE factor is to understand the intent of their seniors. This point is vital to the chain of command and it assures total alignment when engaging the opposition. Upon deconflicting personal philosophy with that of the intent of seniors, the data suggests that it is then the responsibility of the commander to reinforce such rules without partiality. The byproduct of such reinforcement will lead to the final component of the CURE factor – order. This data aligns with other research that points toward that positive relationship between communication and organizational productivity (Trahan, 2008).

Habit 3 - Implement Transparency

The third habit abstracted from this study was to implement and embody transparency. Covey (2006, p 153) asserts that “...transparency is about being open. It’s about being real and genuine and telling the truth in a way people can verify. It’s based on the principles of honesty, openness, integrity, and authenticity. I also like to include the principle of light, because when something is transparent, light will flow through it... It enables people to see. It gives them a sense of comfort and confidence because they know there’s nothing being hidden.”

Lauby (2006) suggests that leaders can cultivate transparency in five ways. They include:

- (1) Don't fake but rather be authentic in your leadership. (2) Have an opinion, but stay open to other views. (3) Always be truthful. (4) Be timely and responsive and (5) Think community.

Percentage of sample	Habit	Explanation
25.7 %	Lead by Example	Take care of your followers first, model the way in everything, eat last, close the say/do gap and consume alcohol in moderation.
22.8%	Communicate, understand, reinforce the rules without partiality and establish order.	Take the time under rules, communicate your intent up and down the chain often and enforce such standards.
21.7%	Implement Transparency	Demand integrity from self and organization, confront issue quickly, put in place the three person rule.
11.4%	Know thyself BEFORE command & constantly self-evaluate DURING command	Take the time to learn from past mistakes, understand your personal blind spots and monitor such issues in command.
8.5%	Becoming a Learning Organization	Get a personal team of rivals, make sure your open door policy is really open and praise constructive feedback.
8.5%	Be Humble yet confident	Don't put yourself above the law, learn from the mistakes of others and embrace the Grace adage.
8.5%	Epitomize the Teacher Scholar Model	Ethical PMES throughout the command; read an ethical leadership book monthly and conduct ethical war games.
5.7%	Embrace your Spirituality	Tab into your and cultivate your own personal spirituality without imposing it on others.
5.7%	Keep the main thing the main thing	Stay focused on the big picture
2.8%	Understand moral injury is expensive	Command climate suffers.

Table IV The Habits of a Commander

Additionally, the commanders keenly recommend deploying “the three person rule.” In other words, never engage in an endeavor as a lone ranger. This is ingredients for failure.

Habit 4 – Know Thyself

The fourth habit delineated from the data was the theme of knowing thyself before taking command and constantly self monitoring during command. The Greek expression "Know Thyself" may refer by extension to the idea of understanding human behavior, morals, and thought, because ultimately to understand oneself is to understand other humans as well. This recommendation of the commanders seemingly anticipates the “orange juice principle.” The orange juice principle asserts that what is inside of an orange when squeezed, will come out. In like manner, when a new leader takes command at this level, new pressures will confront them and will bring out that which is within.

To this in, leadership scholars believe that an influencer can come to know thyself through several tools. First, taking a 360-degree feedback survey can help unearth “blind spots,” “hidden” talents and better understand their personal style of leading. Second, taking a personality test like that of Myers Briggs can help an influencer better understand how and why they tick. Additionally, employing the expertise of an objective executive coach can help commanders become more transformational in their approach. In context of impression management, the commanders of this study instinctively understood the value of this principle.

Habit 5 – Become a Learning Organization

In a similar vein of knowing thyself, the data pointed toward becoming a learning organization. A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights

(Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2005). Moreover, learning organizations have several characteristics, including:

- (1) Systematic Problem solving. At this point, one relies on the scientific method not guess work; data not assumptions and simple statistical tools.
- (2) Experimentation or the systematic searching for and testing of new knowledge.
- (3) They embrace creative tension as a source of energy and renewal.
- (4) They are continuously aware of and interact with their environment.
- (5) They foster inquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people share openly and take risks.
- (6) Learning from experiences is a norm.
- (7) Learning from others is expected.
- (8) The transference of knowledge is applauded.

Moreover, learning organizations that show the way (a) lead with questions, not answers (b) they engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion (c) they conduct autopsies, without blame and (d) they build “red flag” mechanisms (Collins, 2001).

From a tactical point of view, participants encourage new commanders to build a solid team of rivals. Such a team is loyal but courageous enough to provide a critical analysis of the situation for the purposes of maintaining the greater mission. The sample recommended making sure your open door policy is indeed “open” to receive factual feedback. Also, it was recommended to build a network of fellow commanders to periodically bounce ideas off of each other. Finally, the data recommended utilizing the ears of the lawyer and the chaplain to assure you are tracking ethically.

Habit 6 - Be Humble

The sixth principle abstracted from the data pointed toward embracing humility. To recap a previous point, Collins (2009) study showed that the mighty fall not overnight but rather through a litany of subtle stages. The first stage, to restate, is the hubris born of success. At this place a leader asserts an arrogant sense of entitlement. This posture, according to the feedback of this study, can easily usher a leader to believe that they are above the law. Additionally, this ugly

American approach (Burdick and Lederer, 1958) does not conform to the sentiments of General Stanley McChrystal. When asked about overarching irregular warfare strategies he states, when I'm asked the question what approach should we take in Afghanistan, I say humility... (Keck, 2009). A healthy sense of humility does not mean to cast away one's confidence, rather to understand the saying, "But for the Grace of God, there go I..." Humble leaders see command as a privilege and a tremendous responsibility not an entitlement.

Habit 7 - Epitomize the Teacher Scholar Model

The seventh habit pulled from the data pointed toward General John A. LeJeune's teacher scholar model. This model depicts the relationship of officers and the enlisted as that of being teacher and scholar. LeJeune believed that Marines should depart the Corps "far better men physically, mentally, and morally than they were when they enlisted." He adds by asserting"

To accomplish this task successfully a constant effort must be made by all officers to fill each day with useful and interesting instruction and wholesome entertainment for the men. This effort must be intelligent and not perfunctory, the object being not only to do away with idleness, but to train and cultivate the bodies, the minds, and the spirit of the men."

This notion of a "constant effort" is exactly what the leaders in this sample highlighted. More specifically, the commanders recommend incorporating ethics based PME's within their training cycle and when in theater. This step can help mitigate proportionality, restraint, and judgment issues when under pressure. Additionally, the commanders recommend reading a fair share of ethical leadership literature and making such books required reading amongst top leadership. Finally, the novel ideal of standing up irregular warfare ethical war games may be just as valuable as being weapons qualified.

Habit 8 - Embrace your Spirituality

The eighth habit to surface from the data was to embrace one's spirituality. Ashar and Lane-Maher's (2004) understanding of spirituality in the workplace undergirds this paper. They contend,

Spirituality is an innate and universal search for transcendent meaning in one's life. In addition, although it can be expressed in various ways, we submit that spirituality at work involves some common behavioral components. Above all, it involves a desire to do purposeful work that serves others and to be part of a principled community. It involves a yearning for connectedness and wholeness that can only be manifested when one is allowed to integrate his or her inner life with one's professional role in the service of a greater good. (p. 253)

Moreover, Marques et al (2005, p. 87) expands upon Maher's (2004) workplace spirituality by stating that nineteen distinct traits are affiliated with this construct. They include "ethics, truth, believe in God, respect, understanding, openness, honesty, being self-motivated, encouraging creativity, giving to others, trust, kindness, team organization, few organization barriers, a sense of peace, a pleasing workplace, interconnectedness, encouraging diversity and acceptance."

It must also be noted that researchers have produced empirical evidence to demonstrate the prudence of embracing one's spirituality in the workplace. To illustrate, research demonstrates that spirituality increases job involvement, organizational identification, and work satisfaction. Additionally, spiritual behavior at the organization level leads to enhanced corporate performance. Also, studies show that spirituality can increase a person's overall well being. Next, spirituality enhances a person's ability to navigate through adversity. Finally, spirituality plays a key role in helping people to cope with illness and psychosocial stress respectively

(Kolodinsky et al, 2007; Marques, 2008; McCullough; 2006, Ellison, 1992; and Williams et al, 2001).

Perhaps the above empirical data is what motivated Lieutenant General John R. Allen to make a bold call for the formation of spiritual leaders at the 2009 Marine Corps University graduation ceremony. Though the commanders of this sampling are of the same mindset, they caution not to impose such spirituality on the entire organization but rather to make it available. Foster and Griffin's (2000) publications delineate twelve ways to stay spiritually fit. They include: (1) Meditation, (2) Prayer, (3) Fasting, (4) Study, (5) Simplicity, (6) Solitude, (7) Submission, (8) Service, (9) Confession, (10) Worship, (11) Guidance and (12) Celebration.

Habit 9 - Keep the main thing the main thing

The ninth principle to arise from the data was to keep the main thing the main thing. This notion of staying focused again is the antithesis of Collin's (2009) second stage of derailment. As a reminder, Collin's work found that the mighty fall secondly as the result of an undisciplined pursuit of more. In other words, when leaders got out of their lane of specialty, ethical problems become the order of the day.

Covey (1989) recommends several practical steps to say no to the distraction of the undisciplined pursuit of more. Some of them include (a) capturing your vision and writing it down, (b) keep a time management matrix to monitor your energy, (c) make a list of hot bottom issues and delegate those that are not as pressing, (d) organize weekly and (e) commit to this process faithfully. Such recommendations can help one stay singular in their focus and cut through, like a laser, unethical distractions.

Habit 10 - Understand moral injury is expensive

The final theme to surface from this study is to understand that moral injury is expensive. Though on the surface this point is obvious, it warrants the direct quote from one of the participants to nail home the point: *“New commanders must understand that their ethics echo throughout the command gaining greater volume at the lower levels of command. Consequently, if a commander implicitly or explicitly condones an inappropriate action or behavior, he gives free reign to more adverse actions and behaviors....”* Articulated another way, everything rises and falls on leadership (Maxwell, 1998). The question now becomes, “what type of habits are you employing to take your team to the next level?”

Discussion

This study began with three research questions. In an effort to equip commanders with the most relevant and practical feedback, this publication wanted to first understand “What are the top military ethical challenges for commanders today?” The top issue of the sample revolved around “The Judgment factor.” More specifically, the leaders in this study expressed issues like “exercising combat restraint, choosing between the lesser of two evils, supporting what they believed to be flawed policy and aligning personal values with that of the entity as well as fairness in treatment of the entire team.”

It must be noted that the second attribute of the Marine Corps’ 14 Leadership Traits is known as judgment. Judgment is defined as the ability to think clearly and rationally and make sound decisions. The mere fact that this study pointed toward judgment being the chief issue suggests that more ethical attention is warranted in the overall training and education of the military member.

The second research question endeavored to understand “how can we best prepare our leaders to side step such moral land mines for the sake of the greater mission?” As delineated in table IV, this study highlighted ten ethical habits of a commander. One can argue that these “soft” skills can be the difference maker in the context of COIN. Though it is critical to embrace the “hard” components of leadership (i.e. intelligence, analytical, technical, rigor and vision) it is also fitting to embrace habits that will empower leadership to win the hearts and minds of internationals.

The final lingering inquiry of this work is answered from a subjective point of view. It was framed to the reader, “But what do you hope...Do you think you can govern (command) without getting your hands dirty?” The phrase “without getting your hands dirty” is defined as not compromising one’s personal sense of integrity while commanding troops. It is the judgment of this writer that there are three sets of hands that command.

Dirty Hands

First, there are dirty hands. Dirty hands can be defined as leaders that don’t utilize their ethical resources and consequently cripple the command. Such influencers are typically very talented but epitomize Collin’s (2009) empirical findings in *How The Mighty Fall*. To reiterate, the first stage is the hubris born of success. At this place a leader asserts an arrogant sense of entitlement. This posture quickly becomes problematic in the face of ethical challenges. The second stage is described as the undisciplined pursuit of more. Here the leader no longer keeps the main thing the main thing. They are typically gunning for the next promotion at the expense of the team.

The third phase is referred to as the denial of risk and peril. Typically, the leader ignores sound feedback and presses forward based upon their own mindset. The fourth level is known as

grasping for salvation. At this place the leader desperately begins to reach out for help but is usually too late. The final step of the dirty hands leader is the capitulation to irrelevance or “career” death. In the context of command, one can argue, humiliation, relief of command and mission setback is the order of the day.

Dirty but Covered Hands

Second, there are dirty but covered hands. Dirty but covered hands can be defined as those leaders that rise to the top but don't stay there too long because they fail to tap into ethical resources. Arguably this category of personalities is talented and politically savvy. Such a combination, talent and political sense, over time have earned them a level of “cover” in influential places. Thus, allowing them to excel even though they have an unethical reputation. They too conform to Collin's (2009) findings but are able to cover it up through their connections for a season. But in the sentiments of King (1962) truth that is crushed to the earth will rise again. In other words, talent may take one to the top but one's character will keep them there.

Clean Hands

The third set of hands can be referred to as clean. Clean hands can be defined as those leaders that understand their own limitations and actively work on such blind spots by utilizing their ethical resources. Such commanders, I contend, are servants that authentically come to the table asking, “What's best for the rest” as opposed to asking, “What's in it for me?” Additionally, they seemingly get Sun Tzu's assertion and employ a set of ethical principles that create the type of culture that proactively defuses situations like that of Abu Grab. More specifically, Sun Tzu contends that, “*The first of these factors is moral influence... By moral influence I mean that which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders...*” Perhaps

the habits outlined in this study can cause war fighters to be in harmony with their leaders in the 21st century?

The Major General T.S. Jones Metaphor

Another possible way to ingrain such ethical habits into both the hearts and minds of the war fighter is through the usage of a metaphor. What exactly is a metaphor?" Weick (1979) asserts that a metaphor is a "figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy, as in the phrase, evening of life. Metaphors supply language with flexibility, expressibility, and a way to expand the language. Many theorists agree... that metaphors are necessary, and not just nice" (p. 47).

Moreover, Ortony (1975) asserts that metaphors are grounded within a threefold consideration. He states that, 1) metaphors provide a compact version of an event without the need for the message to spell out all the details; 2) Metaphors enable people to predicate characteristics that are unnamable; 3) Metaphors are closer to perceived experience and therefore are more vivid emotionally, sensorially and cognitively.

In an interview with Retired Major General T. S. Jones, he highlighted a model that he utilized during his time as a commander and currently uses at *Outdoor Odyssey* (a not-for profit organization that empowers youth to grow through adventure). As depicted in figure 1, his MEPS concept is premised upon a triangle. Such a shape is a simile of the various components of a person or an organization that must be addressed if it is to thrive. Such elements include the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. He goes on to assert that such a model must begin with

“genuine concern” for the led. Without such a concern, he further contends, the MEPS paradigm is pointless.

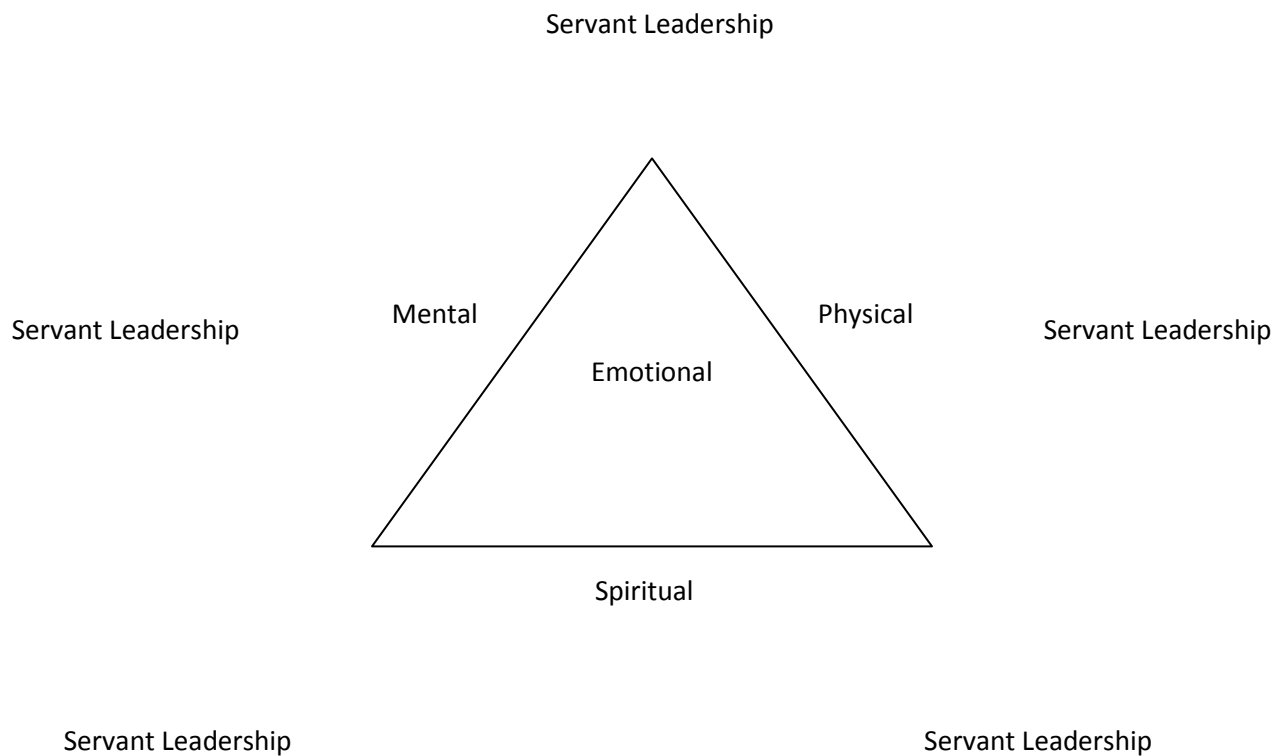


Figure I The Major General T.S. Jones’ MEPS Model

For purposes of this publication Jones’ notion of “genuine concern” is framed as servant leadership. Greenleaf (1977), whom many credit as the father of this construct, defines servant leadership as

...the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first.. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served... Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived.

Patterson (2002) adds that servant leaders are those who serve with a focus on the followers, whereby the followers are the primary concern, and the organizational concerns are peripheral. The servant leader is motivated by virtues. Virtues are defined as the good moral quality in a person, or the general quality of goodness, or moral excellence. This explanation is further illuminated in the ensuing seven elements of servant leadership as depicted by Patterson. They include:

1. Agapao love. This is a love in social or moral sense. This love causes leaders to consider each person not simply as an end but as a complete person.
2. Acts of humility. This trait encourages one not to be self-centered but to function in an other-center way.
3. Altruistic. This involves helping others selflessly just for the sake of helping, which involves personal sacrifice, although there is no personal gain.
4. Visionary. This involves casting a picture for the future that produces passion.
5. Trusting. At this place the leader says what they mean and mean what they say.
6. Serving. This is defined as maintaining a sense of mission of responsibility to others.
7. Empowers. The leader gives power to others. This gesture requires listening, making others feel significant, emphasizing them and values equality.

A cursory analysis of the above traits of servant leadership or “genuine concern” seemingly overlaps with some of the habits of this study - (a) leading by example, (b) implementing trust, (c) walking in humility, (d) C.U.R.E and (e) becoming a learning

organization. Thus, if a person aligns their influencing style to that of servant leadership, fifty percent of the habits of this study will be modeled before the team.

Mental Toughness

The mental toughness aspect of Jones' model can be addressed through training and educational modules. Two specific habits can be placed within this category – (a) epitomizing the Teacher Scholar Model and (b) understanding that moral injury is expensive. I contend, however, that the most effective way to assure such habits are saturated throughout the command is through the learning process known as the Socratic Method.

The Socratic Method can be defined as a conversation, a discussion, wherein two or more people assist one another in finding the answers to difficult questions. Seiferth (1997) suggests that: Socratic questioning is a highly disciplined process. The Socratic questioner acts as the logical equivalent of the inner critical voice which the mind develops when it develops critical thinking abilities. The contributions from the members of the class are like so many thoughts in the mind. All of the thoughts must be dealt with and they must be dealt with carefully and fairly. By following up all answers with further questions, and by selecting questions which advance the discussion, the Socratic questioner forces the class to think in a disciplined, intellectually responsible manner, while yet continually aiding the students by posing facilitating questions. A Socratic questioner should:

- a) Keep the discussion focused;
- b) Keep the discussion intellectually responsible;
- c) Stimulate the discussion with probing questions;
- d) Periodically summarize what has and what has not been dealt with and/or resolved;

e) Draw as many learners as possible into the discussion.

I strongly recommend trainers embrace the above method as well as incorporating various ethical war games to strengthen mental toughness. Two excellent resources for such “games” can be found in the Marine Corps Gazette January 1997 – March 1999 editions and the Leadership, Ethics & Law of War Discussion Guide (found at <http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/mcu/li/>).

Emotional Intelligence

The centerpiece of Jones’ model is emotional intelligence (EI). Yulk (2002) states that EI is the ability to integrate emotions and reason such that emotions are used to facilitate cognitive processes and emotions are cognitively managed. Some of the components of EI, to recap, include a person’s ability to first be self-aware or to “know thyself.” Knowing oneself involves understanding personal limitations as well as strengths. The second piece of EI is self – regulation. This includes the ability of a person to employ discipline to one’s limitations and strengths in a proactive manner particularly in combat. Third, EI mandates a person to be able to self-motivate even in the face to intense conditions. As of a result of the above, the fourth element, one may be inclined to become more empathic with others.

Physical Toughness

The physical toughness component of Jones’ model can be addressed through the various combat centered standards (i.e. physical fitness) indigenous to the various branches of the military. Studies suggest that there is a link between the discipline associated with exercise, health and one’s ability to endure stressful events (Manz, 2003). The obvious inference for commanders at this point is to assure that their team operates at a peaked and balanced physical level. To do otherwise could possibly undermine the overall health of both the individual and the command.

Spiritual

The final aspect of Jones' model is that of spirituality. This notion of helping the service member to understand their purpose in life is paramount to both the individual as well as the entity. Monroe (1997) seemingly echoes this sentiment, declaring that, "The worst thing in life is not death but a life with no purpose (i.e. spirituality)." To negate this element by omission or commission is similar to driving a car with only three wheels. Can this be done? Yes, but with tremendous consequences.

Limitations & Strengths

This study has an array of limitations and strengths. To illustrate, the sampling size may be too low. Though Patton (2002) suggests that the scientific community does not provide clear numerical guidance for qualitative research, fifty-two commanders do not necessarily capture the sentiments of the whole. Additionally, the diversity of the sample is skewed. More specifically, the commanders of this study were largely white males in the United States Marine Corps and the United States Coast Guard.

The pivotal strength of this study is the pioneering effort. In other words, this work breaks the silence within the literature to empirically understand ethical issues specific to military commanders. Moreover, the various habits unearthed in this study can serve as both a practical discussion guide for leaders and a building block for scholars.

Recommendations for future Research

In an endeavor to advance the greater ethical leadership dialogue, I offer two recommendations. First, replicate this study with an improved sampling size and by incorporating greater diversity (i.e. military branches, gender, race and the international community). Second, create an instrument that can measure how well a leader is incorporating

the habits of an ethical commander. Embracing such recommendations can potentially bring more empirical clarity to the study of ethics as well as help us win the wars of the 21st century.

Reference

- Borek, J., Lovett, D., & Towns, E. (2005). *The Good Book on Leadership: Case Studies from the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- Burdick, E., & Lederer, W. J. (1958). *The Ugly American*. New York: Norton .
- Collins, J. (2009). *How The Mighty Fall* . New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
- Coons, K. C., & Harned, G. M. (2009). Irregular Warfare is Warfare. *JFQ Issue 52, 1st quarter* , 97 - 103.
- Keck, K. (2009, October 1). 'Humility' needed in Afghanistan, commander says. Retrieved October 4, 2009, from CNN Politics.Com:
<http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/10/01/us.afghanistan/index.html>
- Larimer, L. V. (1997). *Ethical Virtuosity*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: The Larimer Center for Ethical Leadership, Inc.
- Lauby, S. (2006). *How to Make Your Business More Transparent*. Retrieved October 4, 2009, from Mashable: <http://mashable.com/2009/09/30/business-transparency/>
- Maxwell, J. C. (1998). *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Newell, D. (2002). The smarter they are the harder they fail. *Careet Development International, Vol. 7, No. 5* , 288-91.
- Trahant, B. (2008). Six Communication Secrets of Top-Performing Organizations. *Public Manager* , 68.
- William, P. (1979). *The My Lai inquiry*. New York: Norton.