

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
Marine Corps University  
Corporals Noncommissioned Officers Program

CPL 0202  
Jan 99

STUDENT HANDOUT

Leadership Traits

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- a. TERMINAL LEARNING OBJECTIVE : With the aid of the references, identify the Marine Corps' Leadership fundamentals, per the references. (CPL 23.4)
- b. ENABLING LEARNING OBJECTIVE (CE): Without the aid of but per the reference, identify the definition of each of the leadership traits. (CPL 23.4d)

OUTLINE

1. LEADERSHIP TRAITS: The traits and principles of leadership are the yardsticks Marines use to determine their own leadership abilities and that of their subordinates. These traits and principles do not come with any manufacturer's warranty guaranteeing that, if followed, they will make you an effective leader. They will not guarantee success, but they are important goals and standards which all leaders should strive for and which, in their application, certainly increase a leader's effectiveness. However, what is the result when a leader fails to understand or apply any one of these traits and principles? The results of failure to apply these fundamentals are obvious. For example, lack of decisiveness, knowledge, poor judgment, not looking after your men's welfare; any of these failures by a member of the unit or by the leader may result in Marines getting killed, poor unit cohesion, or low morale. Our profession is deadly serious when it comes to the requirements for effective leadership by all Marines. The important thing is to realize that knowledge of these basic tenets of leadership is not enough; the leader of Marines must instinctively apply these traits and earnestly develop in subordinates the same qualities. The leadership traits are:

- a. Integrity: Integrity is the quality of absolute honesty, trustfulness, and uprightness of character and moral principles. In the Marine Corps, a few Marines hold the lives of many Marines in their hands. As a leader you must have unquestioned integrity. Honesty, sense of duty, and moral principles must be placed above all else. You must be totally trustworthy for your subordinates to have faith in you and for your seniors to have confidence in you. The trait of integrity is developed by following these practices and habits:

- \* Practice absolute honesty and be trustworthy at all times, not only with yourself, but with others. Never shade the truth.

- \* Be accurate and truthful in all statements. Don't tell your superiors only that which you think they want to hear. Tell it as it is -- but tactfully.
- \* Stand for what you believe, even if the belief is an unpopular one.
- \* Place honesty and duty above all else.

EXAMPLES: A Marine who uses the correct technique on the obstacle course, even when they cannot be seen by the evaluator.

During an inspection, if something goes wrong or is not corrected as had been previously directed, the Marine can be counted upon to always respond truthfully and honestly.

b. Knowledge: Knowledge is familiarity gained through association or experience. Nothing will gain the confidence and respect of your subordinates more quickly than demonstrated knowledge. As an NCO you should develop a program of learning. Development of knowledge and skills is not only for military purposes. You study and read not only to keep up with current changes in military policies but also to keep in tune with matters of general interest. To improve your knowledge, you can take correspondence courses (MCI), study field manual and technical manuals, or read articles on varied subjects. An excellent source of knowledge is from discussions with people of sound experience. Ask questions of these people every time you have a chance. Remember, before you can teach someone else how to do something, you first must know how to do it.

EXAMPLE: A Marine who not only knows how to maintain and operate his assigned weapon, but also knows how to use the other weapons and equipment in the unit.

c. Courage: Courage, the physical and mental control of fear, is essential to leadership. Courage is a mental quality that recognizes fear, yet enables you to meet danger or opposition with calmness and firmness. Courage is a quality of mind that gives you personal control, enabling you to accept responsibility and to act in a dangerous situation. You show physical courage when you continue to perform in the face of personal danger. Physical courage also means controlling your emotions. You show moral courage when you stand up for and enforce decisions that are right even in the face of popular disfavor. Admitting errors takes real moral courage. To develop the leadership trait of courage you must:

- \* Place duty over your personal desires or feelings.
- \* Look for and readily accept responsibilities.
- \* Speak in a calm tone; keep an orderliness in your thought processes; don't make any physical danger or hardship bigger than it really is.
- \* Stand for what is right, even in the face of popular disfavor.
- \* Recognize fear but control your emotions.

EXAMPLE: A Marine accepts criticism for making subordinates field day for an extra hour to get the job done correctly.

d. Decisiveness: Decisiveness is the ability to weigh all the facts in a situation, analyze them, and then arrive at a sound and timely decision. But before you make a decision, you must be sure that you have all of the available facts. In combat, a good plan that is executed in a timely manner and properly supervised is always better than a great plan that is executed in an untimely manner. Decisiveness is largely a matter of practice and experience. To develop the trait of decisiveness you should:

- \* Form the habit of considering several points of view for every problem.
- \* Learn from the mistakes of others.
- \* Force yourself to make a decision and then check the decision to see if it is sound.
- \* Talk to people and practice making your conversations logical and clear.

EXAMPLE: A bad example is General McClelland, the Union commander during the battle of Sharpsburg during the Civil War. Prior to the battle, he received a copy of General Lee's plan, including the current dispersed disposition of his forces. If McClelland would have acted decisively, he could have defeated Lee's forces piecemeal.

e. Dependability: This is reliability. A dependable leader is one who can be relied on to carry out any mission to the best of his or her personal ability. They do not accept failure when confronted by obstacles. Instead, they look for ways around the obstacles. To be dependable you must voluntarily and willingly support the policies and orders of your seniors. This does not mean blind obedience but, rather, a high sense of duty. This high sense of duty results in your setting very high personal and unit standards. You put personal interests second to military duty. To develop the leadership trait of dependability you should:

- \* Practice honest thinking and avoid making excuses.
- \* Accomplish the assigned task, regardless of the obstacles.
- \* Always be prompt and do all tasks to the best of your ability.
- \* Be careful about making promises and personal deals. But when you have made them, build a reputation for keeping them.

EXAMPLES: A fireteam leader is told to cross a river with his fireteam at a certain point near a bridge. When the fireteam leader realizes that the bridge has been blown up, he reconns up and down the river till he finds a fjord instead of going back to his squad leader without accomplishing the mission.

A staff sergeant who hates detailed, tedious paperwork, yet makes sure the report meets his and his supervisors standards before it leave his desk.

f. Initiative:

(1) Initiative is simply seeing what has to be done and doing it without having to be told. As a Marine NCO you must develop initiative, not only in yourself, but in your subordinates. Your Marines will develop trust and respect when you take prompt action in meeting a new

situation. To develop initiative in subordinates, you should assign tasks according to the subordinate's ability and experience. But once a task is assigned, don't tell the subordinate how to do it, unless he asks for suggestions. By allowing the subordinate to do the job, it not only develops initiative but frees you to do other tasks. Closely related to initiative is resourcefulness. The successful NCO must know the materials available and how they can best be used to accomplish the mission. Resourcefulness sometimes means using materials to deal with a situation even when these materials and methods are not normally used.

(2) Another side of initiative is the ability to anticipate. Simply stated, this is the ability to foresee situations before they arise. This prior knowledge gives you a chance to plan for the event and be prepared to deal with the situation. It is easier to prevent a fire than to put one out.

(3) Initiative, with resourcefulness and anticipation, gives you an advantage. When you combine initiative with good judgment and experience, you have a strong leadership plus. The key to initiative is to recognize the task and accomplish it, using the resources at hand. To develop initiative you must practice the following:

- \* Develop and maintain a state of mental and physical alertness.
- \* Look for tasks to be done and do them without being told.
- \* Practice thinking and planning ahead.
- \* Anticipate situations before they arise and have a plan already developed.

EXAMPLE: A leader sees a unit recreation room that is in disarray and immediately directs those in the area to sweep, swab, or otherwise square the situation away.

g. Tact: Tact is the ability to deal with people without causing friction or giving offense. More simply stated, tact is the ability to say and do the right thing at the right time. You must use tact not only when dealing with seniors but with subordinates. To successfully use tact, you must be courteous because courtesy, when given, will usually be returned. It is important that courtesy not be misunderstood as "brown-nosing." Inexperienced NCO's may wrongly feel that politeness in a military command is a sign of weakness. All orders given will be obeyed but those given with courtesy will be obeyed willingly. Even in emergency situations where orders must be abrupt and rapid, there is no room nor need for discourtesy. Usually you will find that a calm and courteous, though firm, manner of speech gets the best results. Tact becomes very important when dealing with criticism of a subordinate. Lack of tact can crush a Marine's spirit and initiative. Criticism must be made in a manner which will point out a weakness in the subordinate's actions but still encourage the subordinate to continue to show initiative. To develop the leadership trait of tact you must:

- \* Be considerate. Develop the habit of cooperating in spirit as well as in fact.
- \* Study the actions of successful senior NCO's who enjoy a reputation for being able to handle Marines successfully.
- \* Check yourself for tolerance and patience. If at fault, correct your habit.

- \* Apply the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It is vital to teamwork.
- \* Let no Marine, superior or subordinate, exceed you in courtesy and consideration for the feelings of others.

EXAMPLE: A Marine discreetly points out a mistake in drill to a NCO by waiting until after the unit has been dismissed and privately asking which of the two methods are correct -- anticipating that the NCO will realize the correct method when shown, and then provide correct instruction to the unit.

h. Justice: Justice is fairness! As a Marine NCO you give rewards and punishments as each case merits. Justice must be impartial. Personal feelings, emotions, beliefs, and prejudices are not allowed to influence your decision. When dealing with a situation that requires justice, you must be fair, consistent, and prompt. It only takes one unfair decision to hurt your reputation and lose the respect of your Marines. Each Marine rates individual attention; each case should be looked at individually and be dealt with fairly. Justice is not only involved in dealing with problems; it is rewarding a job well done. When you use justice in recognizing outstanding effort, you boost morale. To improve the trait of justice you should:

- \* Search your mental attitudes to determine prejudices; then seek to rid your mind of them.
- \* Learn to be impersonal when imposing punishment or giving rewards. Be absolutely impartial when performing these duties.
- \* Search out the facts of each case.
- \* Analyze cases that have been decided by leaders who have the reputation for justice.
- \* Study human behavior and be a student of human nature.
- \* Be honest with yourself.
- \* Recognize those subordinates worthy of commendation or award. Don't be known as one who only hands out punishment.

EXAMPLES: The fair apportionment of tasks by a squad leader during all field days.

A Commanding Officer who overlooked a critical piece of evidence which resulted in the unjust reduction of a NCO in a highly publicized incident. The CO decides to set the punishment aside and restore the NCO to his previous grade even though the CO knows it will displease his seniors and may even reflect negatively on his fitness report.

i. Enthusiasm: Enthusiasm is showing sincere interest and zeal in the performance of duties. You should tackle all tasks cheerfully and with determination to do the best job possible. Enthusiasm is contagious and is an excellent way to set the example for subordinate Marines. Demonstrated enthusiasm in training and instructing develops a happy, close-knit, and successful unit. To develop the trait of enthusiasm, both personally and in others, you should:

- \* Explain "why" the mission must be accomplished, time and situation permitting.

- \* Understand, know, and believe in your work.
- \* Tackle all tasks with a cheerful "can-do" attitude even when you don't agree.
- \* Believe in your mission, no matter what it is.

EXAMPLE: A Marine leads a chant while on a hike despite being physically tired, encourages his fellow Marines to persevere, or offers to help carry a load that is giving someone great difficulty.

j. Bearing: Bearing is a Marine's general appearance, carriage, deportment, and conduct. By your bearing you establish a standard for your peers, superiors, and subordinates. Your appearance should show confidence, competence, alertness, and energy. Your clothing and equipment should be neat and clean at all times. Your voice and actions should be under control. Few things can steady the morale of troops like a leader who, with full knowledge of the difficulties of a situation, neither looks nor acts worried. When speaking to Marines, talk in short, plain sentences. Never talk down to Marines nor allow sarcasm to enter the conversation. Vulgar speech, frequent loss of temper, and irritable nature show a lack of self-confidence that subordinates easily see. They react to lack of self-confidence with resentment or even insubordination. (Avoid criticizing an entire group of Marines for the failings of a few. Those who didn't do anything wrong will resent it). Your bearing should show dignity and control of both emotions and actions. Dignity shows pride and confidence in yourself and the ability of the Marine. Emotional control shows that any situation is well in hand. To develop and improve bearing you should.

- \* Practice control over your voice, facial expression, and gestures.
- \* Demonstrate calmness, sincerity, and understanding.
- \* Master your emotions so that you control them and they do not control you.
- \* Speak simply and directly.
- \* Never reprimand subordinates in the presence of their subordinates.
- \* Observe and study leaders who enjoy a reputation for good bearing.
- \* Know and adhere to regulations concerning dress, grooming, and conduct.
- \* Demand the highest standards of yourself and subordinates.
- \* Avoid indiscriminate use of coarse behavior, profanity, and vulgarity.

EXAMPLES: A Marine who wears a clean and pressed uniform, shined boots and brass, and keeps a trim, fit appearance.

A Marine who avoids using profane or vulgar language.

k. Endurance: Endurance, like courage, has two distinct parts. Physical endurance means not giving in to pain and being able to function even when tired or in pain. Mental endurance is the ability to think straight when fatigued, distressed, or in pain. Demonstrated endurance brings respect from subordinates. Lack of endurance fails not only to set a proper example for subordinates to follow, but it can be mistaken as lack of courage. You increase both mental and physical endurance by:

- \* Avoiding excesses that lower both physical and mental stamina.
- \* Keeping physically fit by exercise and proper diet.
- \* Learning to stand discomfort by undertaking hard physical tasks.
- \* Forcing yourself to study on occasions when you are tired and your mind is sluggish.
- \* Finishing every job regardless of the obstacles.

EXAMPLES: A Marine keeps up on a 10-mile forced march even though he has blisters on both feet and had only an hour of sleep the previous night.

An XO works all night to ensure that promotion/pay problems are corrected as quickly as humanly possible because he realizes that only through this effort can one of his Marines receive badly needed back pay the following morning.

l. Unselfishness: This is the act of being generous. The unselfish leader is one who gives credit where credit is due. Unselfishness means not taking advantage of a situation for personal gain at the expense of others. No subordinate can respect an NCO who takes credit for jobs well done and blames others when performance is poor. As an unselfish Marine NCO, you must ensure that your subordinates' needs come before your personal needs. To develop unselfishness you should:

- \* See that subordinates have the best that can be obtained for them under the circumstances.
- \* Try to understand the problems of subordinates, whether personal or professional.
- \* Put the comfort, pleasures, and recreation of subordinates before your own. In the field your Marines eat before you do.
- \* Give credit to subordinates for jobs well done and ensure that any recognition from higher commands is passed on to the deserving Marine or Marines.

EXAMPLES: An NCO ensures that all members of his unit have eaten before he does, or if water is scarce he will share what he has and ensure that others do the same.

If a Marine needs extra instruction or guidance, the leader is expected to make his free time available whenever a need arises.

m. Loyalty: Loyalty is the quality of faithfulness to your country, the Marine Corps, your seniors, and your subordinates. Demonstrated loyalty wins respect and confidence from seniors and subordinates alike. Loyalty means protecting your subordinates from abuse, but does not mean protecting them when they are wrong. Loyalty means supporting the views and methods the unit employs, but it doesn't mean becoming a "yes man." There is a time and a place for you to tactfully give input to your superiors, but once they make their decision, you must enthusiastically carry out their orders, as though the orders were your own. Every action you take must reflect loyalty to every area where you owe allegiance. To develop loyalty you should:

- \* Be quick to defend subordinates from abuse.
- \* Never give the slightest hint of disagreement with orders from seniors when giving instructions to subordinates -- to do so will only encourage them to be disloyal to your orders.
- \* Practice doing every task to the best of your ability. Wholeheartedly support your commander's decisions.
- \* Pass down all orders from superiors as though the orders came directly from you.
- \* Never discuss personal problems of subordinates with others. Keep them confidential.
- \* Stand up for your country, the Marine Corps, your unit, and your fellow Marines when they are unjustly accused. This includes your wife and children.
- \* Never criticize seniors to subordinates.
- \* Do not discuss command problems outside the unit.
- \* Be loyal to your seniors and subordinates. Support the lawful policies of senior officers whether you personally agree with them or not. Remember loyalty is a two-way street.

EXAMPLE: A squad leader gives a suggestion to his platoon commander on how to defend the platoon's sector. The platoon commander listens to the suggestion but decides on a different course of action which will take more work to carry out. The squad leader enthusiastically sets out to obey the order. When the squad complains, the squad leader explains the reasoning behind the order, but does not mention his own plan to his squad.

n. Judgment: Judgment is the ability to logically weigh facts and possible solutions on which to base sound decisions. Judgment includes common sense! When faced with information that is new or not understood, seek advice before you attempt a solution. It is not degrading to ask questions. It is embarrassing to arrive at a poor solution because of the lack of judgment to seek help. To develop the trait of judgment you should:

- \* Practice making estimates of the situation.
- \* Anticipate situations which require decisions, to be prepared when the need arises.
- \* Avoid making rash decisions.
- \* Approach problems with a common sense attitude.

EXAMPLE: A Marine has just returned from thirty days in the field and it's a Friday afternoon. The Marine's platoon sergeant passes the word that everyone is secured for liberty until Monday but that their 782 gear would be inspected first thing Monday morning. The Marine decides to clean his 782 gear first, and then turn to on liberty.

REFERENCE: Marine Corps Values and Leadership User's Guide for Discussion Leaders