



## The First Person You Must Lead is YOU!

**Brigadier General (Ret) Becky Halstead**

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Have you ever thought, *What are THEY doing?* Or, *WHY are we doing this?* I admit, I am sometimes guilty of blaming others for my problems, my situations, and my frustrations. And if I am completely honest, I have to admit I sometimes even think, *That is happening to me because I am a woman.* And I have often asked myself, *Would I hire me? Would my boss consider me the "must have" person on the team? If so, why? If not, why not? What are my values and what makes me valuable to the team? Am I fulfilling my purpose? Am I authentic?*

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It took me many years to realize that life does not owe me anything except opportunities. However, what I do with those opportunities—my choices, my decisions, my attitudes—are up to me! This explains why two children grow up in the same family in the same home, yet their lives take completely different turns; two people work in the same environment and for the same boss, yet performance and potential greatly vary.

### The FIRST Person I Must Lead is ME!

Mohandas Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." If I want to see change in myself—my family, my community, my work place—it has to start with me. Each of us must set the example first before we demand it of others. So, I draw a circle around my boots (high heels, tennis shoes, whatever works for you), and take a deep look at myself. As a General in the Army, I never asked of my Soldiers that which I was not willing to do myself. That is called walking the talk.

How about you? Are you leading yourself? Are you being the change you wish to see in others? Are you part of the problem or part of the solution? Do you come to work with a positive attitude and an expression on your face that communicates, "Yes!" and "Make it happen!" Are you a bridge or a wall to others?

Every person has a purpose and the potential to do great things. Leaders develop and shape their purpose for their organizations and for the individuals who make up their organizations. They identify the great potential in others and celebrate success in their achievements. One leadership value I treasure most is grace—seeing the good in others, seeing their talents and gifts, and seeing the positive in all of life's situations and challenges.

### Make up Your Own Mind

A simple yet effective exercise you can do right now at your desk is to write down the traits and skills you expect and want to see in your leaders. Think of a trait as a component of character—a "heart" value—the emotional intelligence of a person. Think of a skill as a component of competence—a "mind" value—something learned; the intellect of a person. Here are a few to consider while you're getting started:

Traits: Confidence, respect, honesty, accountability

Skills: Problem solver, communicator, critical thinker

***"Be the change you want  
to see in the world."***

***~Gandhi***

When you finish your list, assess yourself against that list. How do you stack up against your own criteria for those who lead you? We become better human beings and more effective leaders ourselves, once we discover our strengths, manage our weaknesses, and hold the mirror up to the same criteria we expect from others.

Let me close by asking one more question: What would be your definition of leadership? Try writing it out. Use bulleted phrases and identify the important elements for you. Don't worry—there is no approved solution or right answer. As a matter of fact, the definition of leadership changes over time, experience, responsibility, promotions, and influences of others in our lives.

My definition of true leadership contains five elements. Look for it in the next newsletter and we can compare notes!





## The First Person You Must Lead is YOU! Part II

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OK, pull out those notes you've been working on since the last newsletter! Take a look at your definition of *leadership*. I would love to know what you wrote down—I'd be very interested to know why you chose some of the elements, values, and principles in your definition. I suspect I would hear stories

about people *for* whom you've worked (the good, the bad, and the ugly—they all shape our leadership style), and the ones *with* whom you've worked (peers are some of our most valuable sources of feedback), and those whom you have led. The war stories of your experiences would be fascinating to hear.

Our leadership style is developed over years of experiences, knowledge, and relationships. Based on the combination of all the aforementioned in my life—twenty-seven years leading and serving in the U.S. Army; four years at West Point playing collegiate sports and constantly training to be a valued member of a team; and growing up as a kid who was involved in band, chorus, sports, and church—I developed the following definition of leadership:

*"The fusion of heart and mind, in selfless action, for the betterment of others, to effectively accomplish the mission, and to make a difference."*

Note that my definition is easily broken down into five main parts.

**Part One: "The fusion of heart and mind..."** In other words, the traits and skills we possess (like character and competence) must be used in concert with each other. Think of traits as those things that relate more to our personality and chemistry—things we are born with. Whereas skills are those things we learn. Have you worked with a leader who was intellectually gifted, but really didn't seem to care about you as a person? Or maybe you know of a leader who is a great cheerleader, but not very smart? Leaders must desire to learn every day, and sometimes, many times, that means learning from those you lead. When making decisions, leaders are wise to balance their intellectual response with the emotions deserving of the situation.

**Part Two: "...in selfless action..."** Selfless, to me, means doing something for someone who can do absolutely nothing for me. How often do we give ourselves credit for helping someone along, but our true motive was hoping they would help us in return? Selfless also means being humble—not worrying about who gets the credit. Leadership is about *doing*, not just *being*. So don't forget the key word—"action"—it means doing for others.

**Part Three: "...for the betterment of others..."** Great leaders understand the importance of being part of a team, care about the greater good of all over self, and define success by how they help make others successful. Remember, success is a team sport!

**Part Four: "...to effectively accomplish the mission..."** There are several key words to consider here. *Effectively*—why not efficiently? Too many organizations focus on just efficiency—better, faster, cheaper. The data! Effectively brings the human dimension to light. Effectively means choosing the right people at the right time for the right mission. Effectively puts a face on the data. If more leaders put a face on the data, there would be less greed, corruption, and catastrophic failure. What is the *mission*? How many times have you seen people work hard, but there seemed to be no direction? Leaders provide the direction, the strategy, the goals—they provide the task and purpose called "the mission." People then begin to work smarter, not just harder.

**Part Five:** Let's pause before going to Part Five. If my definition of leadership stopped with the first four elements, would it be safe to say that we defined "success" for a leader? I think so. We see it every day. I think a larger majority of the workforce than we suspect works toward retirement as their definition of success, or they think by making a lot of money or achieving a certain position of authority or earning various titles makes them successful. There is nothing wrong or bad about working toward these things—they are all *good*. But is *good* good enough? What about desiring to leave a legacy? What about taking an organization to the next higher level of performance? (Read *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, and note his powerful concept of how "the enemy of great is good.")

As a leader and valued member of a team, I was rarely satisfied with just good. Therefore, the last element of my definition of leadership had to be: **"...and to make a difference."** Making a difference is about being significant, taking it to the next level, leaving a legacy, desiring that those you lead will surpass your own success. It is also about being focused on helping others versus focused on your own accomplishments. Significance ties in and preserves the "selfless" element, which allows your leadership example to endure.

*"Making a difference is about leaving a legacy ... desiring that those you lead will surpass your own success."*

Many successful people find themselves financially, even morally, bankrupt at the end of their lives.

Whereas leaders of significance are usually revered, respected, and upheld *beyond* their lives. If you were hiring, would you select yourself for the team? If you were giving the eulogy for your own funeral, how would you be remembered? Assess yourself as a leader within your organization, your family, and your community—are you successful or are you significant?

I've lived many days for which I wish I could receive a "do over," but we only get one chance to pass through time. As our head hits the pillow each night, may our ultimate goal be that we can say: "Someone else's life is better today because I was in it."

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