



A LEADERSHIP PRIMER - General Colin Powell

Speaker: Bill Fugate

Colin Powell was born in New York City on April 5, 1937. General Powell served as the 12th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense, from October 1, 1989 to September 30, 1993, under both President George Bush and President Bill Clinton.

He was educated in the New York City public schools, and at City College of New York (CCNY). He participated in ROTC at CCNY and received a commission as an Army second

lieutenant upon graduation. He subsequently received a Master of Business Administration degree from George Washington University.

Powell served two tours of duty in Vietnam, and as a battalion commander in Korea. He later commanded the 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and V Corps, United States Army, Europe. Prior to being named as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he served as the Commander in Chief, Forces Command, headquartered at Fort McPherson, Georgia.

Highlights of Power Point presentation titled "A Leadership Primer":

"Being responsible sometimes means pissing people off."

Good leadership involves responsibility to the welfare of the group, which means that some people will get angry at your actions and decisions. It's inevitable, if you're honorable. Trying to get everyone to like you is a sign of mediocrity: you'll avoid the tough decisions, you'll avoid confronting the people who need to be confronted and you'll avoid offering differential rewards based on differential performance because some people might get upset. Ironically, by procrastinating on the difficult choices, by trying not to get anyone mad and by treating everyone equally "nicely" regardless of their contributions, you'll simply ensure that the only people you'll wind up angering are the most creative and productive people in the organization.

"The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership."

If this were a litmus test, the majority of CEOs would fail. One, they build so many barriers to upward communication that the very idea of someone lower in the hierarchy looking up to the leader for help is ludicrous. Two, the corporate culture they foster often defines asking for help as weakness or failure, so people cover up their gaps, and the organization suffers accordingly. Red leaders make themselves accessible and available. They show concern for the efforts and challenges faced by underlings, even as they demand high standards. Accordingly, they are more likely to create an environment where problem analysis replaces blame.

"Don't be buffeted by experts and elites. Experts often possess more data than judgment. Elites can become so inbred that they produce hemophiliacs who bleed to death as soon as they are nicked by the real world."

Small companies and start-ups don't have the time for analytically detached experts. They don't have the money to subsidize lofty elites, either. The president answers the phone and drives the truck when necessary; everyone on the payroll visibly produces and contributes to bottom-line results or they're history. But as companies get bigger, they often forget who "brought them to the dance": things like all-hands involvement, egalitarianism, informality, market intimacy, daring risk, speed, agility. Policies that emanate from ivory towers often have an adverse impact on the people out in the field who are fighting the wars or bringing in the revenues. Red leaders are vigilant, and combative, in the face of these trends.

"Don't be afraid to challenge the pros, even in their own backyard."

Learn from the pros, observe them, seek them out as mentors and partners. But remember that even the pros may have leveled out in terms of their learning and skills. Sometimes even the pros can become complacent and lazy. Leadership does not emerge from blind obedience to anyone. Xerox's Barry Rand was right on target when he warned his people that if you have a yes-man working for you, one of you is redundant. Good leadership encourages everyone's evolution.

"Never neglect details. When everyone's mind is dulled or distracted the leader must be doubly vigilant."

Strategy equals execution. All the great ideas and visions in the world are worthless if they can't be implemented rapidly and efficiently. Good leaders delegate and empower others liberally, but they pay attention to details, every day. (Think about supreme athletic coaches like Jimmy Johnson, Pat Riley and Tony LaRussa). Bad ones, even those who fancy themselves as progressive "visionaries," think they're somehow "above" operational details. Paradoxically, good leaders understand something else: an obsessive routine in carrying out the details begets conformity and complacency, which in turn dulls everyone's mind. That is why even as they pay attention to details, they continually encourage people to challenge the process. They implicitly understand the sentiment of CEO leaders like Quad Graphics's Harry Quadracci, Citicorp's Lars Kolind and the late Bill McGowan of MCI, who all independently asserted that the job of a leader is not to be the chief organizer, but the chief dis-organizer.

"You don't know what you can get away with until you try."

You know the expression, "it's easier to get forgiveness than permission." Well, it's true. Good leaders don't wait for official blessing to try things out. They're prudent, not reckless. But they also realize a fact of life in most organizations: if you ask enough people for permission, you'll inevitably come up against someone who believes his job is to say "no." So the moral is, don't ask. Less effective middle managers endorsed the sentiment, "If I haven't explicitly been told 'yes,' I can't do it," whereas the good ones believed, "If I haven't explicitly been told 'no,' I can." There's a world of difference between these two points of view.