

United States Army

Strategic Leadership for Strategic Landpower

Make explicit that which is often implicit and what does your boss need you to do



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Strategic Leadership

Senior Leadership for Strategic Landpower

As we advance through our years of service, our time and effort becomes more focused on managing strategic issues for the Army. The more senior we become, the more involved we become with strategic issues that impact larger numbers of people and organizations. Our Lieutenant Colonels, Colonels, General Officers, Sergeants Major, Command Sergeants Major, Senior Army Civilians and Senior Executive Service leaders are the Army's strategic leadership. They face the challenge of applying their leadership towards achieving strategic outcomes across the range of military operations during peace and war.

We would like to share 12 ideas on strategic leadership and how their application can support both organizational success and the successful application of Strategic Landpower. We aim to make explicit which is often implicit and then speak about what your boss needs you to do. Before going any further, let's discuss Strategic Landpower and what it means for our strategic leaders.

Strategic Landpower

The Role to the Nation

When we speak of Strategic Landpower, we are talking about the application of landpower towards achieving strategic outcomes across the range of military operations. The Nation's land forces must not only sustain the capacity to dominate traditional land warfare, but prevail in the Human Domain. The principal players in the application of Strategic Landpower

are Army, Marine and Special Operations Forces. Each are uniquely designed for different purposes, but those purposes all intersect on land where people live and interact.

Strategic Landpower applies across the Prevent, Shape and Win construct. Prior to a crisis, landpower is applied to key and essential areas to maintain stability, build awareness, and establish relationships that prevent or resolve conflict before it becomes a bigger problem. Regionally aligned forces are an example of how we do this right now. Prior to a crisis, we maneuver forces worldwide to maintain strategic balance. Maneuvering strategically means engaging our partners with mission tailored forces to advance shared interests and in doing so, achieve positional advantage.

Once a crisis occurs, Strategic Landpower uses expeditionary maneuver to restore strategic balance. As a result of the time and effort we have invested during pre-crisis activities among the people of a particular region, we are better prepared to transition effectively into a deliberate, responsible and informed application of landpower in decisive operations. When conflict escalates to war, it ultimately becomes a clash of wills requiring the ethical application of violence to compel changes in human behavior. All of our efforts at the tactical and operational level should be focused on the strategic end state related to changing that behavior.

Successful strategic leaders generally follow hard learned personal rules to guide them through the complexities they will unavoidably encounter in their jobs, in addition to the business rules of the organizations they lead. They also require a high level of competency if they are to provide their bosses what they need to make the inevitable hard decisions to achieve campaign and strategic objectives. Good personal rules can contribute greatly to one's level of competency.

Strategic Leadership Principles

Making Your Leaders Successful

We have depended upon several guiding principles for success at the strategic level of leadership. They fit into two categories. The first makes explicit that which is often implicit, taking vision or intent and putting it into definable, measurable, positive action. The other is doing what your boss needs you to do. Both address how we support our strategic leaders, arm them to make the right decisions and assist them with their strategic responsibilities. That said, there are a dozen things important to success in both categories.

1. ***Vision, take the time to get it right.*** Strategic leaders must clearly articulate what needs to be done, and in a general sense the acceptable ways your organization does its business. Crafting a vision is no easy task, and it takes time to get one right. An effective vision helps subordinates establish the campaign objectives that produce strategic outcomes, and should be supported by thorough research which stands up to close scrutiny. To make sure your vision resonates clearly with your intended audience, get the perspective of those with experience in the issues at hand and credibility in the organization. One's vision should be simple, relevant at each subordinate echelon, and easy to communicate to others.

2. ***Make Mission Command Reality.*** The Army's Mission Command philosophy uses mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent. Mission command requires investment in the development of one's subordinates, which is a time intensive process.

Strategic leaders foster a climate which promotes Mission Command principles all the time, not just during deployments and exercises. They provide clear commander's intent for routine matters and complex operations. They coach, teach and mentor. Strategic leaders are transparent and make themselves easily understood. All these efforts allow strategic leaders to both enable

and be comfortable with the independent initiative of subordinate leaders, because you are reasonably certain those subordinates understand your expectations.

3. ***See Yourself.*** An interesting story about the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius says that as he paraded through the streets of Rome receiving the accolades of his fellow citizens, his servant would whisper into his ear, “You’re just a man... just a man.” Humility is critical to the success of a strategic leader. It keeps you grounded in the mission and the interests of our Soldiers. It helps prevent toxicity. Most of us don’t see ourselves very well without some sort of outside look, and at the strategic level it can be easy to assume things are better than they really are. 360 degree evaluations and climate surveys help you see yourself and can be valuable to gauge your success, or determine where you need to improve. Seeing yourself as others see you provides valuable perspective on your performance.

4. ***We are all on the Same Side.*** There are many players on the joint team, and an inclusive approach is beneficial. No one is trying to fail, and at the strategic level it is always best to presume those with whom we disagree are operating out of good faith. Strategic leaders know that no one wins in a personal conflict, and those who make professional differences personal develop negative reputations quickly. Look for opportunities to compromise, keep an open mind, and remain focused on the strategic objective. Save your energy for the battles you need to fight against the enemy, not teammates.

5. ***Decision points always Proceed Policy.*** Often we hear that we have to get policy right first. At the strategic level, it is absolutely true. Set the policy correctly and the rest follows. However, events on the ground often outpace policy. A viable practice, not common but effective, becomes working back through policy to implementation. If you can work to close the gap between the two, then decision points continue policy. Consequentially, never make hurried

decisions. They generally produce poor results and bring regret. It is wise to float ideas informally to your trusted agents, your smart guy (and gal) club, to determine what they really think about decisions you are about to make. Candid feedback is a rare thing; seek it out.

6. ***Use All the Tools Available.*** Clausewitz said that "When all is said and done, it really is the commander's *coup d'œil*, his ability to see things simply, to identify the whole business of war completely with himself, that is the essence of good generalship." This statement is no less true today. Use all the tools at your disposal to inform your strategic decision-making and problem-solving. Your staff, your subordinate commanders and their staffs, and your peers all have skills which can be brought to bear on complex problems. Don't go alone it alone; build a convergence of perspective from multiple sources to make well informed decisions. Never underestimate the effectiveness of using indirect leadership to build consensus and organizational support.

7. ***Take care of People.*** Taking care of people is a strategic imperative. We take care of people by training and developing them, by making them successful in the Army profession and as part of the Joint Team. Invest in a professional relationship with your subordinates and reach out to their families. Understand their goals, spend real time mentoring them. We all have some tremendously talented people working for us. You know you're doing right by your subordinates when they seek you out as a mentor, and when they themselves achieve professional success in their own right years down the road.

8. ***Never Put Your Leaders in a Bad Situation.*** As a strategic leader, you deal with highly complex problems, and in many cases need to solve them quickly. Your organization needs to do many things well at once, and the pressure of dealing with tough challenges can make it easy to push the pressure downward on our subordinates, even unintentionally. Your subordinates

want the team to be successful and want to support you, and that represents power that must be carefully and thoughtfully employed.

Simultaneously, you must effectively manage your boss by providing the same support to your boss that you receive from your subordinates. Just like you expect the best advice, with the greatest accuracy in the time provided, from your subordinates, your boss needs exactly the same from you. And, when a decision is made, execute it as is if it were yours. You are most likely one of many information feeds your boss must consider, and his decisions may be predicated on guidance received from his strategic leadership and just not communicated or apparent to you. So, unless there is something really missing there, or just does not make sense, go forward with it, or if you need to, huddle with your boss and understand where he is coming from.

9. ***Think Completely Outside Your Lane.*** Good strategic leaders need to know everything they can about their lane, other people's lanes, and all the outside influences on one's own primary area of responsibility. There is no artificial separation between the organizations of strategic leaders. Take the broadest possible view of what influences your lane and get smart about those things. Professional curiosity makes one smarter and the broader your informed perspective, the better service you provide others as a strategic leader.

10. ***How Do You Know What You Know?*** Ask questions that challenge what passes as the common wisdom in your organization. Challenge people to explain the status quo, why things are the way they are. This becomes more important when your instinct says the organization can do better. You were selected for your position to use your experience and talents for the common good. Trust your instincts. Build confidence in your academic and analytical rigor to address problems, and produce thoroughly investigated decisions. As mentioned earlier, you also want to build a 'smart guy' club where you can muster some real deep and critical thinkers

into a team to wrestle a problem to the ground, work through the analytics, figure out where you are wrong or right and build an accurate set of options for use by senior leaders.

11. ***Tell your Boss when he is Wrong.*** One of the hardest things in the profession of arms is learning how to communicate with your boss. It is even harder telling him that he is wrong. There are different ways to do this, each best for particular situations, but tact and candor will always rule the day. You can bring up how you disagree with your boss in a meeting when asked. Privately, face to face discussions work well for contentious issues. Conveying disagreement through staffs can be effective, as long as one has a respectful tone. Creating a forum for diverse perspectives also works, and so does a written message or memorandum. Pay attention to how your boss best receives certain kinds of information and use good judgment.

12. ***Building Personal Relationships.*** Your personal relationships foster effective working relations with counterpart organizations. Building a network inside and outside your organization greatly enhances your strategic leadership. Leverage your seniority with other senior leaders outside your organization and agency to achieve common objectives. This is particularly important with interagency teaming. Personal relationships with your counterparts in the Department of State, USAID, and other government agencies is very valuable for strategic level decisions across joint, interagency, international and multi-national partners.

The Importance of Strategic Leadership

Commitment to our Strategic Leaders

As a strategic leader, the art of giving intent-based orders in a positive command climate where everyone understands the left and right limits becomes essential in accelerating solutions to the strategic problems you will encounter. Never lose perspective on what you are doing

strategically and how it impacts tactically. This is a key attribute to balancing intellectual energy with practical application. Know the facts before you get too involved in decision-making, and it is unlikely that you will ever be too well informed when dealing with tough problems. Operate through your network and within your spheres of influence to make strategic pieces move logically. Finally, remember that people do things during war they would not normally do. Build systems to guard against negative influencers, complacency, and ill discipline.

Strategic leadership encompasses the field grade and flag officers, interagency partners, Foreign Service Officers, and Ambassadors engaged in furthering our national interests. Applying it effectively can be difficult, and doing it well is both personally gratifying and extremely important to the future well being of our Army and Nation. Hopefully some or all of the 12 principles we have discussed can serve you well in your role working for a strategic leader, and when you become one yourself.

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