

Leadership Skills – Lead Courageously

By JAKE RYAN

Assistant Superintendent, Northland Country Club



The Tet Offensive was a three-phase military campaign conducted between January 30 and September 23, 1968. The combined forces of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF or Viet Cong) and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) conducted this during the Vietnam War.

The purpose of the operations, which were unprecedented in this conflict in their magnitude and ferocity, was to strike military and civilian command and control centers throughout the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) and to spark a general uprising among the population that would then topple the Saigon government, thus ending the war in a single blow.

A couple weeks ago I was talking with a veteran of the Vietnam War. During his tour he had the honor of serving under George S. Patton (formerly George Patton IV), a Major General in the United States Army and the son of World War II General George Patton.

During Patton's last Vietnam tour he was initially assigned as Chief of Operations and Plans at Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam. However after his promotion to Colonel in April 1968 he was given command of the 11th Armored Cavalry.

The veteran told me stories of Patton's courage during his final and most intense tour in Vietnam, lasting from January 1968 to January 1969. One particular act of courage he mentioned was during a heavy gunfight. In order to hold their position helicopters were flying in dropping off troops for reinforcement. While standing in the open fields Patton directed the helicopters into the combat zone amidst intense gunfire.

During his service Patton would earn two Distinguished Service Cross with one oak leaf cluster, the Silver Star with one oak leaf cluster, the Legion of Merit with two oak leaf clusters, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Meritorious Service Medal, and the Purple Heart as well as Parachutist Badge and Aircrew Badge.

The Vietnam Veteran said he would have happily followed Patton into the

gates of hell if needed. I am sure many men who served under him have the same sentiment.

Comparing the importance of leading a military in war to how we lead our maintenance crew on the golf course is a pale comparison. The implications of war are much larger. Having a maintenance crew that will follow your lead even when the task is not enviable is not easy to do. Stories of courage, like Patton's, highlight a leader's ability to move people in a direction they typically would not move toward. The story the Vietnam Veteran told me offers many leadership aspects to consider. Most importantly, it shows me leaders need to hold their own regard equal to their subordinates. By doing this respect is gained, tasks are completed and goals will be achieved.

I recently corresponded with another veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces. Mr. Roger Prigge was kind enough to offer some of his insights on being a leader.

Roger Prigge
Norwest Bank & Corporation

Mr. Prigge has been involved with Norwest Bank & Corporation (now Wells Fargo) in a variety of positions for 35 years. He started out in the corporation as a trainee and ended as a Vice President in charge of the Money Market Trading Operations. The core of the money market consists of banks borrowing and lending to each other, using commercial paper, repurchase agreements and similar instruments. He is a veteran of the United States Armed Forces, serving for 25 years. As a Navy Pilot he was on active duty from 1955 to 1959 and in the reserves from 1959-1980. Through his career the Cold War was going on. During that time he experienced the intensity of a long period of conflict, tension and competition, between the United States and the Soviet Union, and their respective allies. He retired as a Commander of the Minneapolis Naval Air Reserves.

Mr. Prigge has sat on many boards during his time with Norwest and continues to sit on various boards since retiring in

1993. He sat on the World Trade Association board for the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce and was a board member for the American Institute of Banking. Currently he is a board member of the Lutheran Church Foundation. He earned his Bachelor's from Concordia College in St. Paul and a Master's of Banking from the American Institute of Banking. He enjoys spending much of his time being a part of and giving back to the church. Faith is a part of his life that is very important to him and his family.

Championing something that you believe is right or important requires conviction. It's not always easy to go against the mainstream or to choose the more disruptive course of action. Therefore, knowing what is important to you will strengthen your convictions and values.

How do you clarify what is really important to you?

Roger said his upbringing, education, and spiritual faith as a Christian clarify what is important to him. When coming up with important things in life ask yourself questions. What is important to me? What do I value the most? What is worth fighting or standing up for? What values will I never compromise? Periodically evaluate whether you are leading your team in a way that is consistent with your beliefs. Think about the legacy you want to leave your team and your organization. Evaluate what you are currently doing, and make whatever changes are feasible or most realistic.

Identifying what is most important to you establishes the foundation for leading courageously when it matters.

How do you take a stand for your values and bolster your leadership courage?

During his management years Roger believes he had excellent rapport with those who worked for him because he

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always treated them like he wanted to be treated. He did not allow cursing, swearing or anger outbursts. Look for situations in which others may be overly concerned about taking a stand, but where you strongly believe in the "rightness" of your position. Make your rational and position clear to others. Look for opportunities to stand up for what you believe. Push visibly and openly for the kind of involvement that supports your values.

Managers are often faced with situations in which taking the most appropriate course of action carries with it a backlash of complaints, problems, and negative reactions. It requires courage to take action in these situations.

If others perceive you as lacking courage, how do you go about demonstrating managerial courage?

Roger believes you can do this by asking for input from subordinates before making or announcing your decision on a controversial issue. Then tell them why you reached your decision. Good commu-

nications are important. Also, support your people when they make tough choices, particularly when people complain to you. Don't forget the people side of making tough decisions. Identify one risk you are afraid to take. Carefully analyze its potential benefits and negative consequences.

Remember the old adage "choose your battles carefully" when you are deciding how best to spend your energies. You can't possibly do everything, but it is especially critical for you to address the issues that get in the way of, or further the development of, your mission.

When driving hard on the right issues what guidelines do you follow to help you focus on what's important?

Always focus on the goal. If you spend too much time on the details you can become bogged down and not reach the goal. Trust your employees and they will take care of the details. You must always think ahead. What are the critical issues that must be addressed for success in the future? If you turn an issue over to someone else, follow up and follow through.

When important individual or team issues come to your attention, it is critical

to respond quickly. Addressing problems keeps them from growing and conveys the message to your team that you are willing to tackle tough issues.

What are some suggestions to ensure that you confront problems in a timely way?

Always take some action as soon as you become aware of the issue. If it requires some investigation on your part, tell the people involved you need some time and tell them when you plan to get back to them with a decision. If a problem recurs, it's likely that the root source has not yet been addressed. If you find that you are dealing with the same problem over and over, take some time to determine what solutions have not worked in the past, and why, and what could be done to solve the issue permanently.

Indecisiveness may result in the perception that you cannot make tough choices or take a stand on issues.

In the past, how have you increased your decisiveness?

Roger has done this by trying to be very positive in his thinking and

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statements. Consider making a list of the major areas in which you have decision making responsibility. Identify areas in which you tend to divert responsibility for decision making. Analyze your concerns about making decisions. Find common patterns. Consider what indecisive behaviors you have. Do you turn to others immediately? Do you have a tendency to second-guess yourself?

As employees grow in capability and

responsibility, they encounter situations in which they must make difficult decisions. Sometimes they turn to their manager to make these types of decisions for them.

To help employees develop confidence in their ability to make tough decisions, how have you challenged them?

Roger would do this by trying not to give them the answer, but rather help them by talking through the issue and leading them to a decision. The amount of guidance you give your employees may vary depending upon their level of expert-

ise and experience. Recognize employees' independent decision-making and initiative. Even when employees make poor decisions, take the time to reward their initiative. Then talk through what went wrong and suggest ways to do it differently in the future.

I would like to thank Mr. Prigge for his time and hope everyone has taken something from this article.

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(Note: If you have any ideas for future "Management Matters" articles please e-mail me at jryan@northlandcountryclub.com.)

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