

THE ARMY LEADER: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF DISPLAYING A POSITIVE PERSONAL EXAMPLE IN THE MODERN MILITARY LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The current global security environment is unstable, marked by ambiguity and countless uncertainties, with trends indicating that the geopolitical context will become increasingly insecure and volatile. In such a challenging environment, military leaders play an important role in ensuring stability, guaranteeing territorial security and protecting citizens. More than ever, the role of the military leader in both the military organisation and society has reached an unprecedented level of complexity. To successfully meet the challenges of the modern battlespace, military leaders must train and develop a very diverse and complex set of competences and attributes. By doing so, the leader can rapidly gain the trust and commitment of subordinates, managing to motivate and lead them effectively in any context. This article aims to raise awareness and understanding of the critical role of positive personal example in modern military leadership.

KEYWORDS: leader of character, leader of intellect, leader of presence, military leaders, resilience

1. Introduction

Considering the speed and dynamism that characterise the conduct of modern conflicts, military leadership has constantly sought ways to achieve the best results, eliminating unnecessary ambiguity. Unlike classic leaders of a civilian organization, the military leaders carry a different responsibility, specifically the lives of the people under their command. In order to cope with the complex demands of the modern battlefield and to protect their subordinates, they must be persevering and

acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to accomplish the assigned missions and to facilitate the decision-making process.

The easiest way for a military leader to receive the desired behaviors is to set a positive personal example to the subordinates. Leading by example may at first glance represent a style that cannot fail. However, the reality is different. Leading by example is one of the most complex styles of leadership, as the military leader is required to successfully assimilate a wide range of attributes from various domains to

build a model that covers the full spectrum of battlespace requirements. This process can only be achieved through education, continuous learning and experience.

Thus, in the context of modern military leadership, exercising leadership by setting a positive personal example to subordinates is the key to success.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Leaders and Leadership – Fundamentals

Even today, the concept of leader/leadership remains one of the most abstract, yet one of the most salient and indispensable. Since the dawn of humanity, any form of social organisation has at some point been led by a person who, by various means, has managed to attract sympathy or impose his/her will on others. Over time, the concept of leadership and the process of leadership it exerts have been interpreted and characterised in many ways.

In any organizational context, the leader is seen as a transformer, a person who succeeds in bringing about changes by adopting a positive motivational approach, leading those around him/her to follow (Baboş, 2020). The US Army Doctrine Publication No. 6-22 (2019) presents leadership as *“the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the situation of the organization”*.

Moreover, a leader is the person who creates and implements the vision, encouraging team members to collaborate and support each other, confident that they have the ability to achieve the goals they have set. Thus, the leadership process involves several aspects that the leader must consider in order to be successful. Creating a team with a high degree of cohesion, imposing clear directions on the work of the organisation, creating the vision according to the current situation but also to the needs of subordinates, monitoring the activities and giving feedback on the results achieved, and last but not least, gaining

organisational support that helps the team to achieve its goal are just some of the leader's tasks and roles when exercising the leadership process.

2.2. The Particularities of the Military Leader

In a military organisation, the leader is given the generic name of commander, defined as the person who has been given the legal authority to lead a military structure. Arădăvoaice (2011) offers an explanation of the concept of military leader according to which: *“The military leader is that person, non-commissioned officer, officer or general, who, whether or not he fulfills a command function, brings together through personal qualities, training, experience, persuasion, charisma and behaviour to engage subordinates in the performance of tasks and missions”*.

Leadership activities in the military differ from those in the civilian environment in many obvious ways. Moştoflei & Duţu (2007) explain that in the military, commanders are responsible for leading and managing personnel and units. They are supported by a staff within each military structure. The commander holds the authority to direct, coordinate, and oversee all aspects of a military unit. This includes planning, organizing, and controlling the efforts of subordinates and utilizing available resources to achieve military objectives. Due to their position, commanders have the legal authority to demand that subordinates take risks, even to the point of endangering their lives, to complete a mission.

The authors emphasize the main characteristic of military leaders that distinguishes them from other leaders, being the responsibility they bear. Commanders carry the lives of their subordinates in their hands and are responsible for their well-being. On the other hand, leaders belonging to civilian organisations do not have the legal authority to ask subordinates for major life-threatening sacrifices. Within the military

organisation, stronger bonds of camaraderie are formed between the leader and subordinates. In the civilian environment, the leader's formal authority extends throughout the working day, unlike in the military where authority is permanent regardless of time and context.

US Field Manual No. 6-22 describes the arduous process an individual must go through to "become" a military leader, stating that *"developing leaders is a complex and complicated undertaking because it is primarily a human endeavor – requiring constant involvement, assessment, and refinement"*. Military leaders often face environments characterized by inherent risk, uncertainty, and ambiguity, and are trained to make critical choices quickly and under pressure. Risk management, flexibility and adaptability, effective communication, conflict resolution skills, and strategic thinking are just a few of the skills that military leaders need to develop and align to the demands of the battlefield.

2.3. Leading by Example – Generalities

Considering today's security environment, the requirements of the modern battlefield have become increasingly demanding. Thus, modern military leadership sets a very strict set of attributes and competencies that the leader must assimilate to ensure success. Today, the complexity of military conflicts requires the leader to demonstrate a high level of flexibility and adaptability by harmoniously blending different leadership styles.

The personal example approach to military leadership has been and continues to be the easiest way to gain the trust of subordinates and to get them to act to achieve certain objectives. The military leader is given formal authority to lead other military personnel because he/she has completed some form of training that proved he/she is worthy of the position. However, the question arises as to why

people who have completed the same form of training end up performing differently in the same position? Simply holding a position does not guarantee that the leader will succeed in achieving the desired results. Thus, in order to avoid the risk of subordinates losing motivation, trust and respect for the leader, the leaders must demonstrate that they have the skills and qualities needed to perform the duties of the positions.

In general terms, leading by example is a leadership style in which the person who applies it wants to model the behaviour of team members through their own behaviour and actions (Yaffe & Kark, 2011). Leading by example is also not primarily about pushing individuals towards excellence, but involves constantly demonstrating excellence.

The hierarchical system of leadership in the military very often involves a dual role: that of commander and subordinate. Therefore, military members have a duty to their subordinates to demonstrate and set an example of what it means to give respect to superiors and loyalty to the goals of the sub-unit and the military organisation. Thus, a leader must set an example for his subordinates. Goldsmith & Reiter (2007) emphasize the idea that *"One of the most important actions, things a leader can do, is to lead by example. If you want everyone else to be passionate, engaged, committed and motivated, be the first!"*

Leading by example brings substantial benefits to the leader and the organisation. These include: higher levels of trust and respect in the leader, increased productivity, high morale, conflict prevention, prevention of role issues, reduced stress, attraction of talent; improved communication within the group as well as organisational communication; increased organisational commitment; positively influencing organisational culture; encouraging involvement and innovation; encouraging professional and personal development of members; enhancing cohesion; building a positive organisational climate.

In order to form and display a positive personal example and avoid instilling certain negative behaviours that can influence unit performance, the military leader must develop their level of self-awareness (Ashley & Reiter-Palmon, 2014). Leaders who lead by example are honest, able to assess themselves accurately. They know their strengths and weaknesses and work hard to become better. They also need to receive feedback from the outside. Giving and receiving feedback must be a constant process that acts as a glue between the leader, the structure he/she leads and the rest of the people to improve cohesion and increase results (London, 2003).

3. Research Methodology

This scientific paper addresses the issue of personal example in modern military leadership. It examines in a very comprehensive way the impact that setting a positive personal example has on achieving success and mission accomplishment in modern battlefield military operations. Additionally, the article critically presents a model based on various attributes and competencies organized into three tiers. When assimilated by the military leader, this model has the potential to optimize the process of troop leading as well as the decision-making process.

In accordance with the specialised literature, the paper will endeavour to attain the following research objectives:

- Exploring the attributes underlying the three fundamental pillars of leadership by example.
- Cultivating awareness regarding the impact of the military leader's positive personal example on achieving personal and professional success.
- Analysing the risks that can emerge as a result of a military leader's negative personal example to subordinates.

To fulfill this, the hypothesis states that adopting a positive personal example will positively influence military leader success in the modern battlefield landscape. Thus, to achieve the research objectives and validate the hypothesis, the authors will undertake an empirical analysis of the existing literature, drawing correlations between various attributes of character, presence, and intellect, and the concept of leading by example. Numerous sources have been collected and integrated to attain the desired outcome. Among these, American military doctrine and its perspective on the model of the effective military leader and its relationship with leading by example have served as the foundation of this work.

4. The Essence of Leadership: Balancing Presence, Character, and Intellect in Modern Military Command

Leadership by example has been described in great detail by the American Doctrine Publication (ADP 6-22, 2019). According to it, leading by example is "*the expression of attributes of character, presence and intellect*". The American model presents a wide spectrum of all the competencies, attributes and skills that a military leader must master in order to achieve full success in leading the people under him or her. All of the attributes presented are not hereditary, and can be formed, assimilated and developed through education and learning. Therefore, the attributes of character, presence and intellect form the three fundamental pillars underpinning leadership by example, without which the leader cannot accomplish the assigned missions. In the following, each attribute will be analyzed in a very marvelous way to provide the clearest understanding of their necessity in shaping a positive personal example.

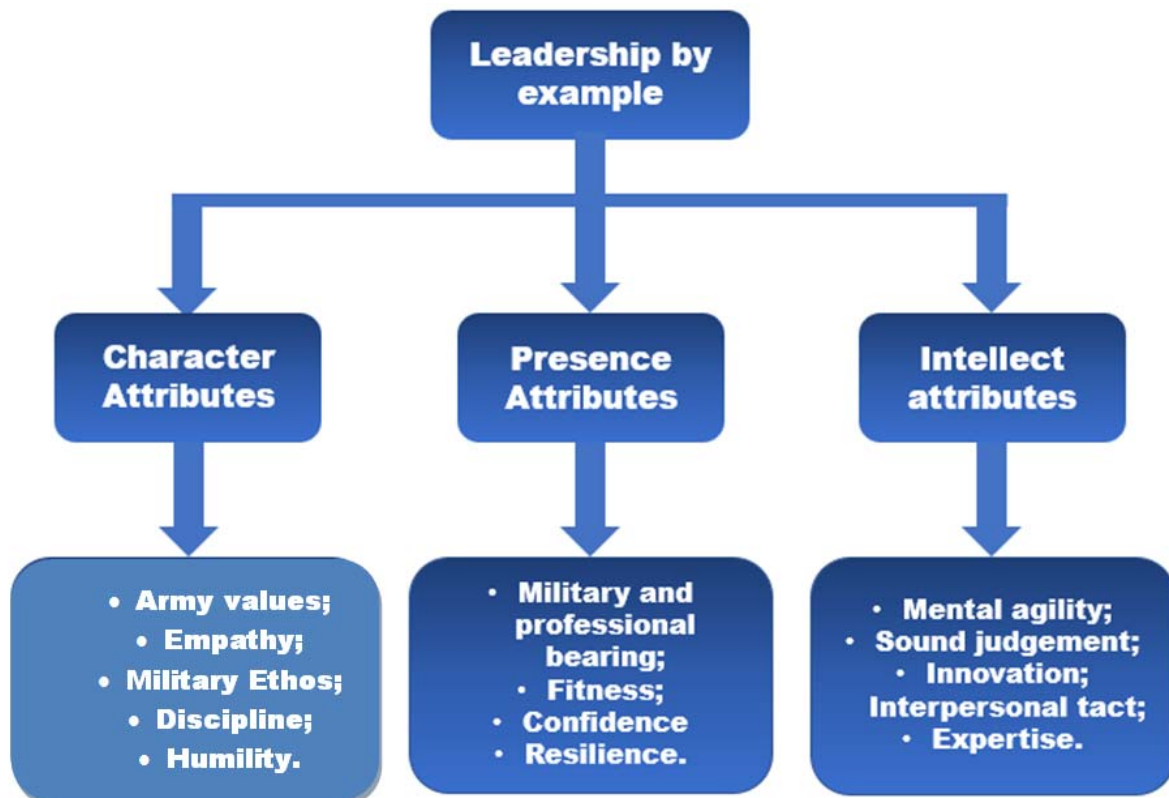


Figure no. 1: *Leadership by example Pillars*
(Source: Authors' own research)

5. Character Attributes and the Core of Shaping Great Leaders

The totality of psycho-moral traits that underlie beliefs, values, aspirations, ideals and guide a person's lifestyle and daily activity is called character (Prahdan, 2009). Character is one of the three basic pillars of a leader who leads by personal example. Unlike temperament, which is innate, character can be formed and changed through education and experience. From the theories of character traits we can understand that there is a set of fundamental traits that make a good leader out of an obedient individual. In the military, there are also a set of attributes that define the character of a professional military person. According to the American

Doctrine Publication (2019), these are: army values, empathy, warrior ethos and service ethos, discipline and modesty. In addition to the education he or she receives, the leader is fully responsible for self-developing character traits and aligning them with the required standards.

Army values are "*principles, standards, and qualities considered necessary for the conduct of daily activities*" (ADP 6-22, 2019). By taking the oath, military personnel pledge to respect and promote the values of the Army. These values facilitate the decision-making process because they set the leader certain standards that ensure the elimination of harmful variants. The main values recognized by the US Army can be seen below:



Figure no. 2: *Army Values*
(Source: Authors' own research)

Empathy as a basic pillar of emotional intelligence is for the leader the ability to fully understand and be aware of a situation, as well as the emotions, behaviours, feelings and thoughts of subordinates, without having them explicitly or in detail described by the person concerned (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). Modern leadership recognizes the importance of empathy in building cohesive teams. Through empathy, the leader not only rewards positive behaviours and punishes negative ones, but initiates an open discussion with subordinates to identify the root causes behind certain decisions they make. As we have already described, the military personnel operates in a very unstable and challenging environment, conducive to the emergence and development of stress. Thus, in order to ensure the success of the unit and to protect subordinates from any dangers, understanding the contribution of empathy and exercising it has over time turned from a recommendation into an imperative requirement. Leaders are advised to pay attention to the behaviour of subordinates and to promote communication and expression of feelings, especially in situations characterised by continuous stress. In this way, the tasks they carry out will not be negatively influenced (Kellett, Humphrey & Sleeth, 2006).

The Military Ethos is a set of generally accepted values and behaviours that make the military a trustworthy person capable of making the right decision in any situation (ADP 6-22, 2019). It also represents a commitment to protect the values of the state, the territory and all its citizens. It is the leader's duty to cultivate the Warrior Ethos among subordinates by promoting resilience, confidence, calmness and critical thinking, determining them to always make the most honourable decision.

Discipline as the ability to control one's behaviour and to work within specific rules and standards is, as George Washington said in a letter to the captains of the Virginia Regiments during the French and Indian War (1759), "*the soul of the army*". Military discipline is a determining factor in the success of the leader and the unit he or she leads, without which the leader cannot set a positive example to subordinates. In order to instill discipline in subordinates, the leader must also be an example of impeccable discipline. This can be done by being fair, transparent and objective in the decisions he makes, by giving the rewards and sanctions provided for by the law, by following orders to the letter and by taking responsibility for his actions (Petrusic, 2020).

Humility “*in its simplest form is the absence of arrogance*” (ADP 6-22, 2019). Leaders who display this attribute are able to evaluate their work in a fair way, without exaggerating certain aspects of their life. It is very important for a leader who leads by example to find a balance in displaying this quality. On the one hand, too little modesty will turn the leader into an arrogant person who will not be liked by others. On the other hand, too much modesty can be interpreted in a negative way by those around, labeling the leader as soft and unsuitable for a position of command.

6. Unlocking the Potential of Military Leaders through Presence Attributes

Demonstrating presence is very much about the transparency of the leader. Very often, when leaders do not have much experience, they choose to build a false image in front of subordinates. This approach is damaging because subordinates can easily distinguish between genuine leaders and the ones who presents themselves as someone else. In reality, in order to win the sympathy of those around them, leaders must be honest both with themselves, embracing both their qualities and flaws, and with those around them, presenting who they really are. Leaders who feel good about themselves, who are confident in their own strengths and who are willing to learn and gain experience from the people under them will have the sympathy and support of those around them. Leadership by presence is also a commitment to compete with credibility and confidence. They must demonstrate to subordinates that they are willing to take risks and overcome hardship (Booher, 2011).

Leadership by presence embodies several attributes including: military and professional bearing, fitness, confidence and resilience.

Military and professional bearing refers to the ability to project a commanding presence and demonstrate professionalism in any social context (ADP 6-22, 2019).

The way the leader presents him/her to others and the behaviour he/she adopts both at work and in society contributes to building a strong military and professional bearing and gaining the trust and admiration of subordinates (Grimmett, 2018). Adherence to the rules of military dress, neat appearance, manners, speech (tone of voice, intonation of certain words in a sentence, pauses) and non-verbal communication (mimicry, communication by touch, maintaining personal distance, gestures, posture) enhance the leader’s authority and respect. Also, the way the leader presents him/her in society, his/her hobbies and behaviour towards close people is another indicator of professionalism and credible military and professional conduct.

Fitness is as much about the physical training of the military as it is about psychological and mental training. First and foremost, good physical fitness is an advantage on the battlefield. Physically trained soldiers show a higher level of adaptability and flexibility and achieve remarkable performances. Secondly, psychologically strong soldiers cope much better with stress and adapt more easily to the demands of the modern battlefield (Gary & Rice, 2020). It is the leader’s duty to maintain both physical and mental health in order to set an example to subordinates. The leader should promote sport in his or her free time, not just at work. The leader should also promote healthy habits, such as a balanced diet, adequate hydration, low caffeine, tobacco or alcohol consumption, optimal sleep, etc.

Confidence is both in one’s own strengths and in the ability of subordinates to carry out assigned tasks. Confidence differs from arrogance, based on a realistic analysis of personal skills and those of subordinates. The leader will have to work in different environments marked by ambiguity and uncertainty which can cause the military to be stressed, affecting their ability to make good decisions. It is

therefore important that they exude confidence and remain optimistic, as even in the most complicated times they are able to produce positive energy that will make others do their best to achieve their goals. A leader who leads by example is constantly aware of the feelings of his subordinates and instills confidence in them to be able to overcome any obstacle (Hollenbeck & Hall, 2004).

Resilience is the military's ability to cope with any obstacle that arises on the battlefield and to carry out the assigned mission (Boe, 2015). Cultivating resilience is done primarily through an awareness of the risks to which military personnel are exposed on a daily basis through their work. In the military, soldiers are prone to injury, failure or even the loss of comrades. Thus, the strength to overcome these situations is the difference between success and failure. Resilience develops over time, as a result of the experience that soldiers gain from encountering various obstacles. However, the leader can cultivate the resilience of subordinates through exercise and training as realistically as possible, as well as by reiterating to each soldier the commitment to protect the values of the state, the territory and all its citizens, the unit and fellow soldiers (Bartone, 2006).

7. Intellect Attributes and Leadership: a Powerful Combination for Success

To lead by example, simply holding a position within an organisation is not enough. The leader must demonstrate to subordinates that he or she possesses the skills necessary to carry out the activities set out effectively. Intellect, as the totality of the brain's mental capabilities and the set of knowledge a person possesses, is paramount to the successful exercise of military leadership (Humphrey, 1976). Intellect underpins all the activities the military leader has to undertake. The military leader is the one responsible for

receiving missions, critically analysing them, planning their execution and making the best decisions. Without intellect, the leader cannot benefit from an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the battlefield, making it impossible to confidently lead his subordinates. While some aspects of intellect are inherited, others can be developed through education and experience. When the leader does not yet have the necessary experience, he or she must compensate with theoretical knowledge and a willingness to learn (Boe, Bang & Nilsen, 2015). The main attributes that characterise a person's intellect are: mental agility, sound judgement, innovation, interpersonal tact and expertise.

Mental agility is a determining factor in managing problems that may arise on the battlefield and developing optimal solutions. It characterises the level of flexibility that helps the leader adapt to change. Mental agility is important because it enables the leader to critically and objectively analyse the situation he or she faces and find creative solutions tailored to his or her needs. Mentally agile leaders are open to change, being able to modify their plan at any time, with their minds constantly open to new possibilities. This ability can also be developed in subordinates by promoting creativity, critical thinking, involvement in decision-making, risk-taking and taking responsibility for mistakes made in training (Rose, 2023).

Sound judgement is another skill needed to achieve success and conduct the troop leadership process. In developing the plan to accomplish the mission, leaders must find the best course of action. In order to do this, they have to know their troops as well as their enemies, develop several courses of action, compare them and consider the consequences of adopting each course of action. Sound judgement facilitates the process of making timely decisions because it allows the military leader to accurately assess situations and draw rational conclusions.

It is formed through experience, trial and error, and by observing how other military leaders act in various situations (Baarda & Verweij, 2006).

Innovation is the ability of military leaders to implement new and creative ideas to the various situations they face. Following certain standard operating procedures is the right thing to do when the unit is faced with situations they have trained for. However, not all situations are the same, which is why the military leader must be creative and come up with new ideas when faced with unusual situations. Innovative thinking is associated with continuous learning and a leadership style in which the leader encourages subordinates to be creative and come up with new ideas that could improve the current situation (ADP 6-22, 2019).

Interpersonal tact is the military leader's ability to interact with others in a diplomatic and calm manner. Leaders who practice this skill embrace diversity and try to positively highlight the abilities of individual subordinates. In addition, they know how to present their ideas in a way that does not offend anyone in the group. Interpersonal tact also refers to the military leader's self-control of emotions. They must be aware that the emotions they express influence the performance of subordinates. The military leader must be balanced and calm when faced with danger in order to set a positive example to subordinates. Balanced display of emotions as the situation requires can provide confidence to subordinates and ensure success (Montgomery, 2007).

Expertise is the characteristic of a leader that is formed over time through experience and education. It encompasses a range of general knowledge of the international security environment as well as specific knowledge such as tactical, technical and geopolitical knowledge. The dynamics of modern military conflict require the leader to continually train and

update this knowledge to meet the complex demands of the modern battlespace. It is also important for military leaders who lead by example to share their own expertise with subordinates. A leader who leads by example in turn develops experienced leaders with extensive knowledge in their field (FM 6-22, 2006).

8. Risks of Giving a Negative Personal Example

The military leaders act as an example to the group they lead, and their actions encourage others in the same way. However, commanders who don't think about leading by example or don't believe they are having that much impact can develop negative behavior that subordinates in the structure they lead begin to follow. As these behaviors become more rooted in the organizational culture, the leader will become unable to change the perceptions formed. For example, a leader who is always late for work will indirectly convey to subordinates that it is not obligatory for them to follow the schedule of the organization in which they work, and they will develop the habit of being late. Even staying overtime, which at first glance appears to be a sign of commitment to the organization and its activities, can have negative effects on the group. True leaders who lead by example are characterized by balance in both their professional and personal lives, guided by the same principles in whatever context they find themselves.

Moreover, negative effects can also be produced by the leader's failure to respect the rules of the organization and the existing hierarchical structure. For example, in the military, where the hierarchical structure is well established and relations between soldiers are based on mutual respect, a commander who does not give proper respect to his superiors will negatively and indirectly encourage his subordinates not to respect the hierarchical

structure. This will have a double negative effect. In addition to the subordinates disobeying and disrespecting the leader, they will also behave in a defiant manner towards other people higher in the hierarchy.

In addition, when people don't lead by example, they may say one thing and then do something that contradicts the previous statement. This lack of integrity and honesty can also be a problem because matching words or promises with actions is the foundation of being a good leader. Leaders need to give their subordinates credibility and trust, and this is only possible if they always do what they say they will do. For example, if the leader says that he will read someone's ideas and communicate his views by Friday, he must act accordingly. People too often feel betrayed by those who say one thing and do another (Owen, Hodgson & Gazzard, 2006). In the military organization, there is a widespread unwritten principle that says you should not ask a military member to do something you would not be willing to do.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, exercising leadership by setting a positive personal example to subordinates is the key to success in the context of modern military leadership. Leadership by example is the successful blending of a broad and complex spectrum of character, intellect and presence attributes. This is only possible through the

military leader's desire for self-improvement and perseverance.

The three pillars of military leadership by example broadly illustrate a range of attributes, the extent to which each leader succeeds in assimilating them being the difference between leaders who achieve notable performance and others.

The leader is obliged to set an example of professionalism and dedication in both the organisational and social context. The responsibility that a military leader bears is different from that of a leader belonging to a civilian organisation. Commanders carry the lives of the people they lead on their shoulders. This responsibility, combined with the degree of ambiguity and uncertainty that characterises today's security environment and the rapidity with which the modern battlespace is changing, makes the leader's job more complex than ever, leaving no room for error.

In order to create a healthy work environment, as well as to increase performance and engagement of subordinates, leaders who want to set a positive example must possess a high level of self-awareness and be willing to receive feedback. These two characteristics are vital to military leadership by example because they help leaders present only those characteristics that positively influence the work of subordinates, and avoid presenting attributes or behaviors that may prove negative and harmful to the group.

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