

Lessons in Leadership from the U.S. Military: Become a Leader of Leaders

Following the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. military accelerated the ongoing and gradual process of searching for the best people available to lead – regardless of sex. As a result, female career military officers began to advance into very visible leadership roles: the first female combat pilot in the U.S. Navy, the first female in U.S. history to command in combat at the strategic level, and the first woman in U.S. military history to assume the rank of a four-star general.

They didn't want to be “female leaders”—they just wanted to lead.

These women were wives, daughters, mothers and sisters. But they were also military leaders, warriors, academics and mentors in their own right.

As the military has evolved to develop an appreciation for the potential of women to serve in the most challenging of positions, it is also time for the American public to see these women for what they bring to the fight: brains, strength and courage.

They are leaders.

No one does leader development better than the military. Behind winning our nation's wars, its primary purpose is to develop leaders. This happens through organized leader development programs, like institutional schooling and courses, but mostly through personal interaction and example. It's the unit-level leaders out there who are making the critical impact in our armed forces.

Falling between Armed Forces Day (the third Saturday in May) and Memorial Day (the last Monday in May), this SUMS Remix honors three female leaders who demonstrated principles of leadership development that all leaders will find helpful in leading their own organizations.

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [A Higher Standard](#) by Ann Dunwoody

On June 23, 2008, President George W. Bush nominated Ann Dunwoody as a four-star general in the US Army—the first time a woman had ever achieved that rank. The news generated excitement around the world. Now retired after nearly four decades in the Army, Dunwoody shares what she learned along the way, from her first command leading 100 soldiers to her final assignment, in which she led a 60 billion dollar enterprise of over 69,000 employees, including the Army's global supply chain in support of Iraq and Afghanistan.

What was the driving force behind Dunwoody's success? While her talent as a logistician and her empathy in dealing with fellow soldiers helped her rise through the ranks, Dunwoody also realized that true leaders never stop learning, refining, growing, and adapting.

In *A Higher Standard*, Dunwoody details her evolution as a soldier and reveals the core leadership principles that helped her achieve her historic appointment. Dunwoody's strategies

are applicable to any leader, no matter the size or scope of the organization. Packed with guiding principles, *A Higher Standard* offers practical, tactical advice that everyone can use to lead and achieve with maximum success.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

It's happened once again. You've lost a key leader and find yourself filling in and doing things you know you shouldn't be doing. So, once again, you promise yourself that this year will be different. You're going to conquer the challenge of leadership development and build a deep leadership bench- a pipeline for developing leaders - for your ministry. But what practical next step can you take to really build a church leadership pipeline?

Why is leadership development a reoccurring problem for so many? In short, it's a lack of intentionality. We know leadership development is important, but few leaders integrate it into their weekly routine. And even fewer develop an intentional plan that ensures an ongoing reproduction of leaders. It's just too easy to be distracted by the urgent and allow the development of leaders to take a back seat to everything else. We feel stuck and we're too busy to develop leaders, but we need more leaders to get all the work done.

Our legacy will be measured by the depth and quality of the leaders we develop.

One of the most important jobs a senior leader has is to develop leaders or to "build the bench." It is common in sports to "build the bench," where a versatile bench is often the determining factor in whether a team survives the rigors of a demanding season while building a team for the future. In your organization, do you have "players" ready to step in when inevitable changes occur?

The temptation is to put building a bench on hold while focusing on imperative day-to-day duties. Without consciously taking time to build your bench, you run the risk of hurting your organization for generations.

Beyond the structured leadership program there's an informal mentoring process that truly makes the Army special. The most important leadership lessons I learned throughout my career came directly from someone who took the time to teach, coach, and share ideas with me. Sometimes it happened in a classroom or a war zone, but just as often it happened during a run or at dinner.

I had many great role models at crucial stages of my career. They helped develop me – and countless other soldiers – without bullying tactics. They didn't care about my gender – they cared about me. They pushed me physically and challenged me mentally. In the military, you can't achieve your best without sound mind and body. Most important, they put their faith in me and put me on the bench.

Ann Dunwoody, [*A Higher Standard*](#)

A NEXT STEP

One of the most fundamental things you must do in a growing church is to build a culture of leadership development. If you wait until the need is pressing then you are already behind. Talk, pray, prepare, and lead as if God is going to bring growth. Doing so will cause you to work with your current leaders to begin producing new leaders for the future.

To understand your current state of leadership development, [download this Leadership Development Assessment](#) and complete it. Review your score and evaluate it in the categories listed.

The following quote from the U.S. Army Field Manual on Leader Development serves as a good conclusion, reminder, and challenge for you and your church:

Army leaders are the competitive advantage the Army possesses that technology cannot replace nor be substituted by advanced weaponry and platforms. Today's Army demands trained and ready units with agile, proficient leaders. Developing our leaders is integral to our institutional success today and tomorrow. It is an important investment to make for the future of the Army because it builds trust in relationships and units, prepares leaders for future uncertainty, and is critical to readiness and our Army's success.

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