

Lessons in Leadership from the U.S. Military: Lead Yourself First

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 - [24/7: The First Person You Must Lead is You](#) by Rebecca Halstead

The real-life experiences portrayed in *24/7: The First Person You Must Lead is YOU* are told with a combination of introspective humor and heart-wrenching candor that will inspire you to consider your approach to leadership from a new perspective—you.

The stories author Becky Halstead, retired Brigadier General, United States Army, shares in this book illustrate leadership principles that transcend age, gender, race, and profession. Her personal leadership journey will capture your attention and cause you to re-evaluate how you define leadership – whether you are a corporate CEO or a high school student.

The book presents the author's five fundamental leadership truths, followed by her key leadership principles, which ultimately lead you to her inspirational definition of leadership. The principles and supporting personal stories cover a lifetime of leadership lessons: from playing sports in high school to taking responsibility for over 20,000 soldiers and civilians in combat as a

general officer in Iraq.

This book is a much-needed guide that reminds you what is really important when you are in a position of leadership. Becky has effectively translated lessons learned as a child growing up in small town USA, as a member of the second class of women to attend the United States Military Academy, and as the first female general to command at the strategic level, to a practical guide for use in the civilian world.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

A mental picture of “leadership” in the context of the military probably includes rows and rows of soldiers standing at attention in front of their commander. While that is correct, it doesn’t start there.

You can’t effectively lead others until you know how to lead yourself.

Envisioning a better future, setting worthy goals, and following through with sustainable impact first and foremost requires leading yourself. Often leadership is a lonely road. And to keep ourselves inspired, motivated, and energized we need to lead ourselves with our heart, purpose, and devotion.

The first person I must lead is me.

Each of us must set the example first, before we demand it of others. Rising up the officer ranks, including as a general, I would never ask my Soldiers to do something I was not willing to do myself. I had to “talk the talk” and “walk the walk.”

Many people have asked me why I think I was successful. As I’ve reflected on my own leadership journey, I believe it boils down to having the foresight and discipline to lead myself first. If I’m not willing to be the example, then I should not be in a leadership position.

How are you doing? Are you an example of the change you wish to see in the world? Are you part of the problem or part of the solution? Do you come to work with a positive attitude and an expression on your face that communicates “Yes!” and “Let’s make it happen!”? Are you a bridge or a wall to others? Are you leading yourself?

Leadership is a choice we make every day.

Rebecca Halstead, [24/7: The First Person You Must Lead is You](#)

A NEXT STEP

In order to first lead yourself, create regular space in your schedule for a time when you can reflect on the following questions:

- Where do I find focus?

- How am I defining success today, this week, this month?
- Who am I looking to for leadership? Why?
- What qualities do I admire in a leader?
- Who do I trust?
- What do I do when things seem impossible?
- How am I building my network?
- How do I understand where we're going before we're there?

Excerpt taken from SUMS Remix 93-1, released May 2018.

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*Each issue SUMS Remix takes a practical problem in the church and looks at it with **three solutions**; each solution is taken from a different book. Additionally, a practical action step is included with each solution.*

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