

FROM THE EDITOR

Why We Need Conversations

Douglas R. Lindsay, United States Air Force Academy

People aren't perfect. Which means, we aren't perfect, and therefore, our leaders won't be perfect. That isn't intended to be negative or pejorative. It is human nature to be fallible. Even with the best of intentions, our actions will occasionally fall short. It is a predictable part of the human condition. What this means is that there will be times, in all of our lives, where we are sitting on the other side of our intentions. What occurs at that moment of recognition is consequential for our development and future trajectory. Ideally, we would like the recognition to occur prior to crossing that metaphorical line. However, as previously established, perfection is the aim, not always the reality. For those in the business of character and leader development, this is understood. It is recognized that leadership is a journey. It takes time, intentionality, and diligence. There will be missteps. There will be relationships that need to be rebuilt. Sometimes, trust will need to be reestablished. There may even be consequences that can endure. While we do not cherish these times, they should also not surprise us when they occasionally occur. If we ourselves are fallible, then we should understand that others are also imperfect and afford them the necessary grace, when appropriate. This is a key tenet of development and development can occur through advancements as well as setbacks. That should be an encouraging thought for all.

To some, this may seem like a peculiar topic to write about for a journal, especially for a journal based at a military service academy. However, over the last couple of years, it has become common, if not altogether normal, for individual's shortcomings (even minor ones) to be vilified broadly and socialized openly. This occurs regardless of domain and almost independent of the individual's intentions. For leaders, this scrutiny is common to the mantle of leadership. Leaders are held to a higher standard due to the responsibilities that are entrusted to them. The

Dr. Douglas Lindsay is the Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Character and Leadership Development (JCLD)*. Prior to assuming his current role, he was a Professor and the founding Director of the Masters of Professional Studies Program in the Psychology of Leadership at Pennsylvania State University. He also served in the United States Air Force where he retired after a 22 year career, serving in a multitude of roles, including research psychologist, occupational analyst, inspector general, deputy squadron commander, senior military professor, Full Professor, deputy department head and research center director. He has over well over 100 publications and presentations on the topic of leadership and leadership development. He received a Bachelor's Degree from the United States Air Force Academy (class of 1992), a Master's Degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio, and a Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Pennsylvania State University.

visibility of their actions and decisions are typically clearly discernable to all around them. When mistakes are made, they have significant, enduring, and often immediate consequences not just on the leader, but on many around them. So, accountability in leadership, and with our leaders, is crucial.

However, one of the things that is often overlooked is that leaders, being human, are in a developmental process (like the rest of us). Each leader is on a developmental trajectory that started long before they assumed their current role as a leader, and will continue long after they vacate their current position. Leaders are selected for their positions based on many factors. Importantly, two of those factors are past performance and the potential to serve in that position. Performance is pretty straightforward. We examine what they have done and determine if it is at a level sufficient enough to take on larger responsibilities. Were they effective in what they were given to do? We use that to think about the second factor, potential. Potential is an inference. Since the individual has not held the position before, we are looking at previous factors to make an educated guess on whether they are suitable for the leadership role. In essence, we ideally use all available information to make a supposition that since they were successful in the past, they have a high likelihood to be successful in future. It is why we have the old saying that, “past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.” We also attribute that to their chance at success. Important in that colloquial phrase is the word *predictor*. It is really a forecast of what we hope to expect from the individual. Since no forecast is perfect, and to go along with the earlier notion that people are fallible, it should not be surprising that often, there are failures. While no organization would state that they are okay with those failures, they should also not be surprised when they happen.

For the organization, it means that when leaders fail, there may be culpability. Has the organization done their due diligence to not only make sure that the person is ready for the position, but it has also provided them the resources and processes to be successful once selected? It is easy, and common to put the full burden on the individual when failure occurs. However, this is often not simply the case. You may hear a narrative around the idea that the person wasn't ready or didn't prepare as if it was solely their responsibility to prepare for a position that they hadn't held before. While there is certainly preparation that should be taken by the individual leader to develop themselves, they are preparing without the full context of the position. Organizations, however, understand what success looks like for the position. They know what they are hiring or promoting to. They know what is needed. If there is not an alignment between what is needed and who is promoted, then failure is one predictable outcome. In fact, failure rates can be as high as 40% for senior leaders in different domains. The point is, the over vilification of the individual, while ignoring the involvement of the organization is not only inappropriate, it has developmental consequences as well.

It is important to introduce an important caveat at this point. When referring to mistakes or failure, I am not referring to those leaders who commit crimes or partake in other nefarious behavior. That is another category of intentionality that has appropriate and significant legal consequences. What we are talking about is when a leader finds themselves on the other side of their intentionality. As mentioned previously, we are seeing these mistakes, often minor ones, being ruminated on in painstaking detail. In essence, we are seeing a one mistake system. Taken to the extreme, we are seeing this play out in the media via a new term in our lexicon: cancel culture. While we want to hold people (and ourselves) accountable for our words and

deeds, we also have an opportunity to discuss, reflect, and give grace. Mistakes will be made. Leaders' behavior will not always align with their rhetoric. But, from a developmental perspective, we must also give room to grow. A developmental path is not always linear. It will not always go up, and it is not always in the predicted direction, and it does not always have clearly identifiable consequences. That is what makes leadership challenging. It is why you hear leadership referred to as a journey, not a destination. Those leaders who think they have arrived when they reach a certain position and think there is no more room to grow are those that we often read about.

The point about it being a journey is a significant one. It is why we dedicate an entire issue of the JCLD every year to that point. There is wisdom in the journey. There is a lot to be learned from other's journeys, sidesteps, and regressions. The mistakes that were made. The challenges faced. The obstacles overcome. The organization's involvement. You see, no leader has ever been successful without at least one mistake. It just doesn't happen. We are human. It is going to happen. When those happen, our first reactions shouldn't be to cancel one another. We need to hold accountable, encourage, support, and allow that person to continue to develop. Though leadership conversations, like the ones in this issue, we get a glimpse inside of the thought processes of leaders. What was happening, what they were thinking, and what they did. It is a powerful learning experience. And, equally as interesting, no journey is alike, or exactly like the individual thought it would be. The leader that we are today is the foundation of our leadership tomorrow. The beauty in the process is that we influence the process. And, when we experience mistakes, we learn from them. Otto von Bismarck understood the process when he uttered, "The wise man learns from the mistakes of others." We see mistakes all around us. While the first reaction of

many is to condemn, from a developmental standpoint, we should be thankful for the example.

At the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) the purpose is to develop leaders of character. Notice the wording. Not make leaders of character, but develop leaders of character. The process is inherent in the wording. We are all working, developing, and leading in some capacity. We need to understand that others are as well. As such, that should give us a developmental perspective for those around us. As organizations, that insight should help us to do things like scrutinize our developmental processes, look at individual needs, and examine position requirements. As you read through this issue of the JCLD, pay attention to the individuals' journeys and how they dealt with challenges, took in that experience, and used those to refine themselves and their leadership.

In This Issue

This issue focuses on conversations with leaders in different domains. Notice that the word 'conversations' is used. We use that term intentionally because it is not just an interview where questions are posed to the individual and they respond. Instead, there is value in the conversation, the back and forth, the asking of questions both ways, the dialogue, and the playing off one another regarding leadership and character. Specifically, we examine leaders across different domains so that some of that contextual flavor of leadership is gained. While there are certainly some leadership characteristics that are effective regardless of domain, the context is a critical leadership factor that is important to capture. In this issue, we have leaders from the military, business, academics, and sports.

The issue begins with a conversation between the Superintendent of the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), Lieutenant General Richard Clark and

Colonel Kurt Wendt, the Director of the Center for Character and Leadership Development at USAFA. In the conversation, Lt Gen Clark reflects over the past year, including its challenges and successes. He also discusses the developmental framework USAFA uses to develop leaders, the Leader of Character Framework.¹In the conversation, you will see how Lt Gen Clark approaches his position and how he feels USAFA has dealt with COVID-19 over the past year.

The issue continues with Lieutenant General (Ret, USAF) David Deptula, the Dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies. In the conversation, Gen Deptula discusses his background (34 years) in the Air Force and several lessons he learned along the way. He also keys in on the importance of the Core Values and its impact on the force. Gen Deptula also describes how the Air Force is uniquely designed to carry out its mission in relation to the other services, in addition to the importance of fiscal considerations and how that has an influence on how the Air Force accomplishes the mission.

Lieutenant General Mark Schwartz (USA), the current U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority next shares his perspective on leadership. He begins with an overview of his extensive career and goes on to discuss what effective leaders need to do. Several of those key behaviors are creating opportunities for those around you and the need to lead through your personal example. He shares several examples of those as he experienced in his career.

Moving to the academic side of leadership, we have a conversation with Cynthia Cherrey, President and CEO of the International Leadership Association (ILA). In addition to sharing a bit about her leadership

journey, she discusses the areas in which ILA is making a difference with respect to its mission of being a global organization committed to increasing quality research, teaching, and practices of leadership. She also discusses several paradoxes in leadership which can create challenges for leaders. Her impactful conversation covers the beginnings of ILA, its growth and development, and several of the areas that they are seeing great opportunity.

The next conversation is with Kirk Hanson who recently retired as the Executive Director of Santa Clara University's Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. Though an engaging conversation, he shares about his background and the critical role he had in establishing the academic field of business ethics. Hanson touches on his leadership journey, important lessons along the way, speaks to the unavoidable ethical challenges that leaders will face, the importance of preparing leaders to face those challenges, and also the importance of leaders to understand that those challenges are a predictable part of leadership.

Brigadier General (Ret, USA) Tom Kolditz, the founding Director of the Ann and John Doerr Institute for New Leaders at Rice University, is the subject of the next conversation. Kolditz shares a bit about his leadership path and about what he and his team are doing regarding leader development at the university level. He explains not only their approach, but also how they ensure they are getting the results that they want via rigorous assessments. He concludes the conversation by sharing how they are impacting universities around the world with respect to intentional leader development.

We follow on with our series of conversations with Dr. Ronald Riggio, the Henry R. Kravis Professor

¹ <https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/21st-Century-LoC-Final-March-2021.pdf>

of Leadership and Organizational Psychology at Claremont McKenna College. In this conversation, Dr. Riggio shares his journey and how he got into the field of leadership. He also discusses the importance of important topics like empathy, developing the capacity to lead, followership, the importance of the situation (context), as well as his own personal development. It is a fascinating discussion of what is going on in the field of leadership and what we need to pay attention to.

The next academic leader is Dr. Michael Mumford who is a distinguished professor at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Mumford discusses his extensive work and research with the military and shares the results of that work. He outlines several key leadership competencies like creativity, self-criticism, self-development, and forecasting that are vital for leader development. Dr. Mumford talks about how the military approaches these topics and where it is having success. It is a great evidence based conversation with very practical applications.

From the domain of sports, we are fortunate to include a brief conversation with Mike Singletary, NFL Hall of Fame linebacker with the Chicago Bears, and football coach. In this enlightening interview, he shares about his faith, the importance of your identity, and knowing who you are and what you stand for. He finishes the conversation with advice on the value of spending time with and learning from great leaders.

We wrap up the series of conversations with Rodney Bullard, Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility at Chick-fil-A, Inc. Bullard starts the conversation sharing about his upbringing, his time at USAFA, career in law, and how he ended up at Chick-fil-A. Through the discussion, he shares an important message that has directed his development: “What is for me, is for me.” It is a powerful conversation that

covers leadership, serving others, and the importance of continued development.

Book Reviews

In addition to the regular articles and conversations in the JCLD, we also like to expose readers to other works that are related to character and leadership. Since there are literally thousands of books printed each year, we try to select a few for every issue that could be of value to your own personal development. Therefore, we have three books that we have reviewed for your consideration. The first is a review of *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* by Cal Newport. This book focuses on how to leverage your cognitive ability to focus deeply on the task at hand without all of the normal distractions. Being able to do so can help to create new value and improve your skills. The second book is *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know* by Adam Grant. In this work, Grant discusses rethinking and pivoting, and how they need to be competencies that leaders possess. He offers several suggestions on how to rethink including unsticking what can get in our way. The third book is *The Bomber Mafia: A Dream, a Temptation, and the Longest Night of the Second World War* by Malcolm Gladwell. This book, while falling short in the reviewer's opinion, does share some good information about the Air Force's early history. However, there are some aspects of Gladwell's conclusions that are at odds with other's opinions. All are encouraged to read the review and see where those differences exists. While not having a favorable appraisal by the reviewer, it does show how there are many books out there on leadership where people have differing opinions. That is okay. As we develop as leaders, we are going to have to sort through some of this information to see what is appropriate and relevant for our own development.

Profile in Leadership

In every issue of the JCLD, we have a section titled *Profile in Leadership* where we take a bit of a deeper dive into a particular leader. What we find in the fields of leadership and character is that you can take away powerful lessons by examining previous leaders and the challenges that they faced and overcame. We offer this profile in order to shed some light on what the leader did so that we can see what information can be applied to our own development. For this issue, Dr. Mark Grotelueschen explores a part of Billy Mitchell's career with respect to what he was able to accomplish leading up to, and at the World War I battle at St. Mihiel. Grotelueschen does a nice job of setting up the context in which Mitchell was forced to operate and then stepping the reader through several of the key actions and decisions Mitchell took to be successful. Through this exploration, there are many leadership lessons to pick up like the power of relationships, the importance of knowing your craft and capabilities, as well as how to make decisions in complex situations. This powerful profile provides a lot we can all learn from regarding leader development and behavior.

Looking Ahead

The next issue of the JCLD (March 2022) will be aligned with the National Character and Leadership Symposium (NCLS) that is held annually at USAFA. The theme for the 2022 NCLS is Ethics and Respect for Human Dignity. This topic is a critical aspect of development for a leader of character and is also an institutional outcome for USAFA. For this issue, we are bringing together a host of articles that examines different facets of this theme. The writers come from academia, the military, business, and other domains. It will be a powerful issue focused on critical aspects that all leaders need to embrace and value.

If you have an interest in submitting work on the above topics or know of someone who would be interesting to have a conversation with, please contact me at douglas.lindsay@afacademy.af.edu or jclld@usafa.edu with your ideas.

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