

## FEATURE ARTICLES

# Warrior Ethos & Leadership Reflections

Senator Tammy Duckworth

**Question:** Can you share a little bit about what effective leadership looks like to you (your approach to leadership)?

**Duckworth:** Leading by example. It's never asking your troops to do something that you wouldn't be willing to do yourself.

**Question:** What role does character have in effective leadership (why is it important)?

**Duckworth:** If you want to be effective long-term, you can certainly instill fear in your subordinates, but that's not sustainable since you're not going to keep those subordinates around or they're going to tire of the environment. It might be useful in the short-term, but it's not a form of leadership that works in the long-term. Character is. If the people that work for you and with you see you as a person of good character, then they're more willing to work with you in the long-term and that makes you more effective.

**Question:** You served in the military for many years, and now you are serving as a Senator. Why the drive to serve? Why is it important for all of us to serve our communities/nation in some way?

**Duckworth:** I grew up overseas as a child during the period immediately after the Vietnam War. I grew up in Southeast Asia and I understood very early on how lucky I was to be an American. How lucky I was to have all the liberties and privileges that come simply with being an American. We were not a wealthy family by any means, but just by being an American I was immediately in a place of privilege compared to everyone else in the entire world. I grew up knowing that privilege is only sustained by service. Most Americans don't serve, which is why it's so

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**Senator Tammy Duckworth** is an Iraq War Veteran, Purple Heart recipient and former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs who was among the first handful of Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Duckworth served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years before retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 2014. She was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2016 after representing Illinois's Eighth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives for two terms. <https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/about-tammy/biography>

important for those who do to continue to serve. It's important for every one of us to give something back. People don't realize how lucky we have it here.

**Question:** You have previously spoken on Warrior Ethos. Can you share a little bit about what that means to you? Why it is important.

**Duckworth:** The Warrior Ethos for me is a grounding place. It's a solid, firm footing from which I can go off and do other things. Keeping the warrior ethos at the center of who I am helps me in whatever role I choose to play, whether as a Company Commander or as a US Senator. If I always remember the Warrior Ethos, it grounds me and centers me and it allows me to put things in perspective when there might be morally ambiguous questions that come before me. It allows me to say, "You know what, I can't do that" as long as I hold to the Warrior Ethos.

**Question:** We stress the ideas of grit and resilience in the military. Can you talk a little bit about the role of grit and resilience in your journey?

**Duckworth:** I think people think of grit and resilience as being tough. Sometimes they're equated with one another, but they're not the same. For me, resilience means you just keep trying. Sometimes to keep trying you have to be curled up in a fetal position. I think about those early days after I was wounded and I woke up at Walter Reed. By no means was I running marathons, but what I did immediately after I was wounded was the ultimate test of grit and resilience. It was the best I could do in the situation that I was in. That doesn't mean you're going to be out there fighting fires with a hero cape on. It just means that you've faced a challenge and you continue to face a challenge that presents itself in front of you and you don't give up. Sometimes grit and resilience manifest themselves in ways that you don't traditionally think of. Sometimes

it's just someone determined to stick it out, even if that means they're crawling and not running.

**Question:** We know that effective leaders continue to develop themselves. Can you share a little bit about what your leader development looks like (reading, etc.)?

**Duckworth:** It's both personal and interpersonal. The personal is that I continually want to improve myself. So, for example, I'm constantly practicing my language skills that I've allowed to atrophy. I have Rosetta Stone and I'm trying to learn new languages. Spanish is an important language to have now so I'm trying to learn it. There's also the interpersonal side of development. I actually have all my staff do extensive evaluations every year where they write up their personal evaluations but also how they feel about the "command climate." From these evaluations, I learn what my staff needs and I learn what I'm not providing to them. It's a learning experience, and it teaches me how I can be a better boss. I try to mentor my team to be better managers and to help my staff develop and have successful in their careers. These evaluations are not just an exercise in filling out forms, they're something I go through with top staff to learn how my Senate office can improve.

**Question:** What advice do you have for young leaders?

**Duckworth:** Trust your instincts and don't give in to peer pressure and some idea of what you think you're supposed to be. You bring your own unique skills and talents to the table and if you try to fit into some imagined model of who you're supposed to be, then you might push away the parts of you that don't fit into that model. But those are the parts that actually make you a better leader.

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