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**Article Reprint  
Timeless Leadership Series**

# FOLLOWERSHIP FOR LEADERS

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**Timeless Leadership Series:** Article Reprint  
By Brigadier General Roger A. Jones, USAF (Ret.)

In this *Timeless Leadership Series*, we feature excerpts on “Followership for Leaders” from Brig Gen Roger A. Jones, USAF (Ret.)

**Never tell people how to do things.  
Tell them what to do and they will  
surprise you with their ingenuity.**  
—General George S. Patton

[...]

## Forget Careerism While You Develop the Careers of Others

The most important job is the one to which you are currently assigned. That principle is as true today as it was when I was on active duty. An individual will not be provided with an increasing level of leadership responsibility if he does not perform his current duties well. Said another way, take care of your job and your career will take care of itself.

The follower can focus on performing well, rather than being a careerist, if the leader fills the role of taking care of her subordinate. The mentoring relationship, where a person of greater experience and wisdom guides the junior person's development, is a key method by which leaders develop their replacements. Great followers constantly seek feedback and search for mentoring opportunities with their subordinates. Smart followers obtain feedback and mentoring from a variety of individuals. For example, the young lawyer can learn a tremendous amount about leading paralegals by talking with and watching the law office superintendent.

## Be a Team Player

Leaders fully appreciate the necessity of teamwork to accomplish the mission. Occasionally, a leader will be challenged with teaching a new staff member who does not

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have much experience working in team settings. Perhaps the individual focused almost exclusively on studies while in school and did not have the opportunity to participate in other activities involving a group effort. Leaders help these individuals transition into the Air Force team environment.

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## Smart followers obtain feedback and mentoring from a variety of individuals.

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Great followers recognize the multitude of benefits to be gained by being part of the Air Force, JAG Corps, and office teams. One of the greatest pleasures I had in my career was the professional collegial atmosphere that I encountered in the legal offices in which I worked. First and foremost, followers must recognize that they cannot be successful if they try to "go it alone." They need to appreciate the knowledge they can gain from the other members of the legal staff, to include those subordinate in grade. If a follower gets to a new office and discovers that the office has few organized social activities, the good follower will seize the initiative and plan office events, such as informal lunches or formal off-site functions. Getting to know each other is a critical step in forming the mutual respect necessary for a positive work environment.

All JAGs and paralegals *must* take the initiative to get out from behind their desks and learn the mission of their Air Force organization—visit other units on base, ask questions about what their clients do, and attend briefings and training sessions on a variety of topics. They should attend conferences and developmental education, which will make them more capable JAG Corps members and will yield a better understanding of the needs and desires of their clients.

### Produce Quality Work

[...T]hree concepts that enable the JAG Corps to positively contribute to the Air Force mission. One of those concepts is Wisdom. [...S]eek "legal information mastery." The JAG Corps has consistently had a reputation for quality work

because its members are not only technically proficient, they also apply wisdom and common sense to their advice.

As a supervisor, I evaluated performance through several measures. Of utmost importance to me was the timeliness of a product or performance. Individuals who operated with a sense of urgency impressed me as dedicated and efficient people who could properly prioritize their duties. Lee Iacocca, a former automotive genius, defined this capability as an ability to deliver an 80 or 90 percent solution on time rather than the 100 percent solution that arrives late.

Procrastination must be discouraged. Although an individual may work best by thinking long and hard about a topic and then putting pen to paper in the final hours before the product is due, or by simply waiting until the final hours to even begin work, this propensity can have a negative impact on others supporting the lawyer. The trial counsel who waits until the week before trial to begin preparing his case will create significant, and otherwise unnecessary, last-minute and late-evening work for the paralegals supporting the case. Failure to plan causes emergencies for them as they scramble to take care of the administrative support details required for a court-martial. Likewise, such procrastination can cause failure as a follower. If the Staff Judge Advocate [SJA] has asked for a trial brief review the week prior to trial and the trial counsel is not prepared, then trial counsel has failed to respond to the boss' desires. In this case, the trial counsel has unnecessarily created stress and hardship on both the followers and the leader.

The ability to produce quality work also requires that the attorney tailor the product to the audience. Leaders understand the need to shape their leadership style to the needs of their subordinates. Likewise, lengthy legal reviews that demonstrate the legal acumen and brilliance of the author are worthless if the commander needs a terse and to-the-point product. As a rule, the treatise style review taught in law schools should be reserved for law review articles. Commanders typically desire to be provided with direct advice that starts with the bottom line, progresses briefly through the key points, and ends with a one-sentence

restatement of the recommendation. They want a clear distinction between what is legal and what is recommended but discretionary on their part.

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**Specializing is not appropriate during the first years of an individual's service.**

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## **Learn it All**

One of the many benefits of service in the JAG Corps is the variety of issues we address. It is rare for someone to join our JAG Corps unless he or she is interested in a broad range of practice areas. The leader provides intellectual stimulation and career development for the followers. Followers, likewise, need to seek opportunities to broaden their knowledge and obtain a good foundation for every aspect of the installation-level legal office. They need to work in various sections of the office to gain familiarity with the major areas of JAG Corps practice. It may be their only opportunity to do so. At the same time, they need to learn and refine their knowledge of the fundamentals of speaking and writing.

Occasionally, I have seen a young JAG or paralegal who begins their career with an eagerness to learn many areas of practice, but who then finds one area particularly compelling and wants to focus on that area. There has always been a place in the JAG Corps for specialists, as dictated by the needs of the Air Force. However, specializing is not appropriate during the first years of an individual's service. For example, the first-assignment JAG may be concerned about being told he will be moved from claims to military justice just when he starts to feel comfortable in his role as chief of claims. While such concern is understandable, the great follower appreciates the opportunity to expand his or her knowledge and recognizes that the leader has confidence in them to be successful in a variety of areas. I have found that, almost universally, once a young counsel is moved into a new area of practice beyond his comfort zone, he quickly becomes excited about the new area of law and enjoys it as much as, if not more than, the previous area. Furthermore, I know from personal experience that failure to learn all fundamentals of Air Force "lawyering" can be very detrimental when being assigned to a leadership position.

## **Make it Better—Change Things**

While new JAGs and paralegals are learning new areas of practice, they should always look for a smarter way of doing business. Leaders must be open to the ideas of their followers. This, in turn, will yield improvement. People new to the JAG Corps can be excellent identifiers of "a better way to do business" in various areas because their minds are fresh and have no parameters. In fact, their inexperience may be an asset in finding better solutions to challenges that the leaders did not even realize existed. For example, the familiarity with rapid advances in technology may help a new person identify a program that can be improved with software that the Staff Judge Advocate may have no idea even existed. Great followers pay attention to what they can improve, and when the opportunity presents itself, they seize the initiative and become leaders of change.

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**Subordinates must understand and appreciate that they can best perform their job if they understand their boss' objectives and how to communicate with their boss.**

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## **Know Your Boss**

Great leaders appreciate how important it is to "know your boss." Quite simply, they didn't become successful leaders without first understanding their own boss and working the issues of that boss. Likewise, subordinates must understand and appreciate that they can best perform their job if they understand their boss' objectives and how to communicate with their boss. Great followers study their boss. They learn what motivates and what disappoints or angers the boss. Some who are creative keep lists of their boss' "pet peeves" to assure they do not make the same mistake a second time. When I was an SJA, whether at the installation or major-command level, I learned about my boss, even prior to working for him, by asking questions of others who had worked for him previously. I also learned not to "shotgun" an answer simply to impress the boss. I resisted the urge to respond to a question until I knew my answer was right. An anonymous author once said, "People who jump to conclusions generally leap over the facts."

## Be the Honest Broker

[The] former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Richard B. Myers [said]: "Having 'Yes-Men' and 'Yes-Women' around is not very useful. You want people to stand up, and you ought to be like Pershing and you ought not to fire them. You ought to encourage them to speak out." For leaders, the challenge is to create an environment safe enough that your subordinates feel free to give you "ground truth." As a follower, the challenge is to have the courage to be the "honest broker." Again, Lee Iacocca said, "If I have six managers giving me the same answer, I need to fire five of them."

**"People who jump to conclusions generally leap over the facts."**

[This is] Valor. Not only do legal professionals require physical courage most often exhibited in the deployed environment, but also the courage of their convictions. They lose their value to commanders if they sacrifice their integrity and become yes-men or yes-women. The key is to use your best judgment and deliver what your boss may perceive as bad news in a prudent manner. Be respectful rather than argumentative. If the legal answer is "No," determine what the boss is trying to achieve and suggest workable alternatives. Unless the boss' decision is illegal, immoral, or unethical, support that decision once it is made. Leave disagreements behind closed doors and publicly support the boss. The partnership of loyalty requires the leader and follower to be loyal to the mission and to each other.

## Always Maintain the Highest Standards of Dress and Behavior

Very simply, JAG Corps leaders and followers live in a glass house. [...] Leaders and followers are representatives for our JAG Corps, Air Force, and Nation—*24 hours a day*. Do not dishonor our fine JAG Corps and the thousands of decent, honorable people who served before you by engaging in illegal, unethical, or immoral conduct. Remember, you are always on parade.

## Maintain Good Health

When I was the Strategic Air Command SJA, we continually emphasized the health and wellness of our Airmen. We knew then what the Air Force has recognized through institutionalized fitness requirements—the health of an individual reflects the health of the force. Leaders must take care of themselves and their team, and followers must take care of themselves. Routine exercise, a wholesome diet, and a healthy lifestyle are all critical in enabling members to be useful to the Air Force. Good health leads to greater productivity, as well as a sense of personal pride and satisfaction.

## Have a Good Time—Enjoy Yourself

You are most fortunate to be serving in the Air Force JAG Corps. My finest memories revolve around my service, and I am proud to continue as a member of the JAG Family. Keep a positive attitude and enjoy yourself. You will be amazed how fast your four, twenty, or thirty years go by. As a two-star general once said to me, "If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right."

### About the Author

(2005 Biography from *The Reporter*,  
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