

LEADING UP, DOWN AND ACROSS

BECOME A BETTER LEADER TODAY!

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The members are not to request me, merely to order me and if I were ordered to carry the nation's flag on but a single vessel, I will sail out to sea and there, entrusted with the members' flag, I shall risk life and limb***

Michiel Adriaenszoon de Ruyter, 17th Century Dutch Admiral
(24 March 1607 - 29 April 1676)

*** Loosely translated from a reaction by De Ruyter to a member of the States General, who questioned his courage.

For Max, Finn and Sem

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Learning from good and bad leadership	13
The structure of the book	13
The right settings	15
1. RAGGING	19
A new challenge	19
In the new	21
Dealing with insecurities	23
The rhythm sense of a tawny owl	25
Perseverance	26
Bearer of bad news	30
Teamwork	31
What a performance	32
Corps introduction	34
Shout louder	35
Freshmen in the afternoon sun	37
Which is the right way, actually?	42
It's over	43
2. THE COLLEGE	45
Study, practice sport, study	45
Inner discipline	46
Annual party	48
Stress on the bridge simulator	50
Dealing with stress	54
Serving as a leader	55
Processing information and setting priorities	56
3. FALL DOWN, GET UP, AND CARRY ON	59
Getting acquainted	59
The deck is shuffled	62
Pathetic engineer	63
Correcting, complimenting, and taking punches	64
Mother goose	65

Invitation	65
The process or the result?	67
A good morning	69
Lambasting or coaching	70
The last straw	71
Stick up for your people	72
Saying farewell	73
Put yourself in someone else's shoes	74
4. UNDER WATER	77
Diver's assessment	77
To give up is not an option	80
In the mud	81
'F' for fail: an 'f'!!	82
Leading when the going gets tough	87
5. CHANGE CAUSES RESISTANCE	91
Warm welcome	91
Time to think	93
Timing	94
A manager controls, a leader inspires	97
Integrity	99
Exemplary behavior	100
Straightforward	101
Division of tasks	102
The new generation rises	103
The carriage seats	104
6. IN AFGHANISTAN	107
Who goes?	107
Proactive	110
Military tour leader	110
From the eight o'clock news	111
Curious	113
To kandahar	113
The c-ied branch	115
Lucky	116
Black sunday	117
Taking responsibility	118
The reason for our stay	119

Listening is an art	120
Mother duck	121
Diplomacy	121
Ultra crepidarian	122
Stress	123
Snapped	125
Small scars	126
7. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES	129
Garlic doesn't stink	129
Different cultures	131
Singing	134
Unexpected performance/presentation	138
Afghanistan in words and images	139
The international community	141
An unexpected interview	142
The politicians' way	144
Hierarchical structures	146
Still a loser	148
The attack	150
Throw in the towel	152
8. LEARNING FROM OTHERS	153
Back from the mission	153
Submarine commander school	153
Infection in port	158
As big as my head	159
On the lamp	160
Collecting building blocks	162
9. A REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP	165
What is leadership?	165
The unwittingly skilled leader	167
The key leadership features; klf	167
10. THE LIDRS MODEL	171
Directing or adjusting the klf	171
The use of the lidrs model	173
KLF 1: social features	175
KLF 2: observed features	177

KLF 3: action features	179
KLF 4: diplomatic features	181
KLF 5: mental features	182
KLF 6: guiding features	185
Practice makes perfect	186
The lids model in use	187
Growing as a leader	190
Which steps do you make in leadership?	192
Stay close to yourself	192
To remember	193
11. THE LEADER OF THE FUTURE	195
Directing on output	195
Networking	196
Collecting information	196
Directing the higher educated	197
Managing up	198
Stability in a changing environment	199
Bad decision	200
The right person in the right place	200
12. REFLECTION	203
Leaders and managers	203
Learn from mistakes	203
You are a leader!	204
A WORD OF THANKS	205
APPENDIX 1 REFERENCES	206
APPENDIX 2 BUILDING BLOCKS OF KEY LEADERSHIP FEATURES	208

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, I crossed the threshold of the ‘Royal Netherlands Naval College’, to begin a career full of adventure and challenges. I actually had no idea what lay ahead of me. There were wonderful stories in a colorful brochure and a commercial oozing adventure, but I was clueless about what would cross my path. I certainly wasn’t aware that the organization would try to prep me to become a commanding officer. I wasn’t aware that I was going to face different types of leaders all around me. Every two to three years would bring a new position, new colleagues, new responsibilities and, in particular, new challenges.

This book is about my experiences: a growth process towards the unattainable objective of ‘perfect’ leadership, obviously not without some reserve. However, my reality may also contribute to your views of leadership. You learn how to lead by experience and by listening, reading, studying and observing. In the end, you will choose the elements that you think may be of interest for the way you lead.

LEARNING FROM GOOD AND BAD LEADERSHIP

There is a lot of literature available on leadership, but which of the many books on the topic do you still use today and which model can you still reproduce? Here lies the benefit of this book. This is a book you are going to use! Appealing stories and a leadership model that is easy to apply will foster your growth as a leader. Not everyone has the opportunity to experience leadership in an organization like the Ministry of Defense. An organization with its own culture, people and circumstances that are not branded as ‘ordinary’; an organization that pours a great deal of time and effort into training its leaders, yet despite all its endeavors, still doesn’t succeed in delivering only good leaders. Even within an organization like the Ministry of Defense, leadership is subject to change. Even there, leadership based on rank or position is a thing of the past. Unfortunately, this change is not self-evident for everyone.

In this book, I will provide examples of good and bad leadership. The stories will present leadership features that are also within you. By making these features transparent and grouping them creatively, it will allow

you to make a simple assessment of yourself, but also of others in their role as leaders. It will make you aware of your strong and weak features and you will be able to work on developing your own leadership skills.

However, there are many theoretical models, practical tips and scores of examples and questionnaires out there to help determine your leadership style. You can get the most peculiar labels pinned on you: tiger, dolphin, rabbit, thinker, doer, dictator, servant, coach, narcissist and many others. For every variable in leadership, a name has been invented and for every idea out there, there is a graph or theory that is difficult to decipher.

All these difficult to understand theories and the many fancy labels are precisely what I have tried to avoid when writing 'Leading up, down and across'. You can subject leadership to thousands of studies, but everyone experiences it differently and every leader will base his or her style of leadership on experiences, knowledge, character and personality. A practically applicable leadership model or a frantic attempt to frame a leadership style will require a flexible point of departure. After all, there are scores of variables that determine which elements of leadership are required in a certain situation. This is precisely where 'Leading up, down and across' has a lot to offer you.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book consists of two parts. I call the first part 'The Story', where I describe my experiences in a predominantly maritime and military environment. The second part, 'The Theory', presents a theoretical framework, resulting in a flexible and easy-to-use leadership model.

Sharing my experiences in Part One provides you with a broader frame of reference for leadership. Each story emphasizes leadership elements that serve as building blocks for the ultimate leadership model.

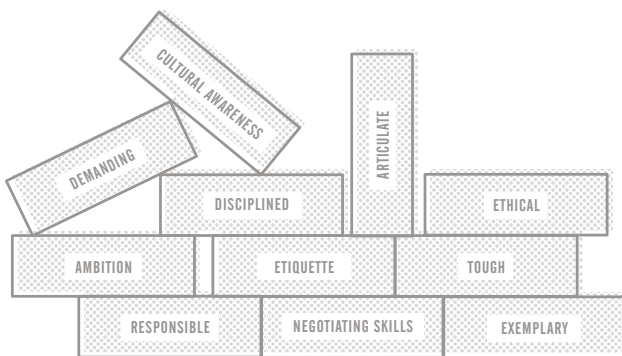


Figure 1: Possible building blocks of leadership

Stories for example about basic military training, sailing on board a marine frigate, deployments to Afghanistan and sometimes general lessons in leadership, make these stories not only meaningful for leaders within the Ministry of Defense, but for those outside the military as well. In fact, you will probably be surprised to note the many similarities between leadership experiences inside and outside of the Ministry of Defense. In particular, the emphatic way of presenting the different leadership styles gives rise to an improved and broadened frame of reference. Still, not every building block will seem equally relevant for each individual model. Clustering and selecting building blocks takes place in the second part of the book.

In the theoretical second part, I use the building blocks to shape the model; a model you can use easily and flexibly to assess and improve your leadership style. The model consists of universal, ‘critical’ characteristics of leadership that are important to you, regardless of the organization for which you work, the number of people you manage or the circumstances in which you find yourself. This is the LiDRS model.¹ With this model, you will be able to navigate on the ideal characteristics of leadership. Not only will you have the opportunity to assess yourself and others, the model also provides the possibility to request feedback about the way you function as a leader. Finally, there are several examples of others who have served as leaders under similar circumstances. This model will allow you to see how they applied their skills in those situations. In order to implement the model, you will need to use the online LiDRS model (www.lidrs.eu).

¹ LiDRS is an organisation active in leadership training courses. The name is an abbreviation of Leadership Development, Research and Support.

THE RIGHT SETTINGS

By the end of this book, you will not only have expanded your frame of reference about leadership through many stories supported by practical tips, but you will also know which simple adjustments to make, in order to master your style of leadership. However, for this book the type of leader you are does not matter, nor does the extent of your experience. The right to lead is something you earn by discovering the best use of the model for your circumstances. The experienced, charismatic leader will probably need to make far fewer adjustments to the model than will the new, less experienced leader. It makes no difference how many adjustments you need to make, as long as you thoroughly assess the management situation and the persons whom you manage.

In this book, no distinction is made between male and female managers. For convenience, I have elected to label the leader in this book as male. This is why the leader in this book is referred to as 'he'. Obviously, this may just as well be read as 'she'.

PART I

THE STORY

1. RAGGING

Knowledge is power, character goes beyond.

- Motto of the Royal Netherlands Naval Institute

Even years later, almost every naval cadet speaks highly of the Corps Introduction Period, the period in which future officers are ‘shown the ropes’. Obviously, the program has changed here and there over the years, but the essence remains the same. As future officers of the Royal Navy, the cadets are playfully taught some of the customs that may be of use to them later in life. During the 1997 introduction period, the training program began with 120 persons, but this number quickly shrank to far below 100. There were different reasons for this, of course: physical complaints, homesickness, social isolation, an overly authoritarian environment, childish ragging and many more. However, when looking back on the period of ‘ragging’, be it in the military, as a student or in some other community, many of its elements serve a specific purpose, which may be of benefit to you later on as a leader.

A NEW CHALLENGE

‘Name?’ the lady behind the table asked me. I was in a large hall of the main building of the ‘Royal Netherlands Naval College’. The place was just oozing maritime nostalgia. The high walls were draped with impressive paintings of naval battles and probably some world famous naval heroes as well. I just didn’t know them yet. The oak parquet floor was a shiny dark brown.

Over the large wooden entrance doors of the hall, a motto read: ‘*Knowledge is power - character goes beyond.*’

Wasn’t I here for a five-year university education? How, I wondered, could this motto be displayed here so prominently, in an environment of learning? I would soon find out, however, that knowledge is indeed power, but knowledge alone will not get you very far. Looking around