

# Lead From the Front

Three final principles to guide you

BY GREG POWELL

**T**he army was my career before I retired after 13 years and joined the financial services industry. The industry gave me the opportunity to continue to serve Canadians and have a meaningful impact on their lives. It has proven every bit as challenging and rewarding.

This third and final instalment of my three-part series on leadership examines the remaining principles of the combat leadership course taught to leaders of the Canadian Armed Forces and shows the parallels to our industry.

Clients are not feeling fear and confusion because of bullets flying, rockets launching or bombs exploding, but they're certainly feeling it as a result of investment market scares, uncertainty in the housing markets and apprehension about the future of our pension and social benefits programs. Given the mayhem out there, strong leadership is more essential than ever.

## 7. ENSURE YOUR DIRECTION IS UNDERSTOOD

Have you ever been in a situation where you thought you had effectively communicated with someone about a task that needed to be completed only to discover later that the person completed it incorrectly? When assigning a project to a manager, instead of asking, "Do you understand?" ask, "Did I explain that sufficiently?" This allows someone to ask for additional information without feeling incompetent.

From there, provide the appropriate supervision based on the individual and the level of the project's difficulty. If you have some uncertainty about a new manager's skill set, don't work over him, work *beside* him. This is a great way to supervise and teach at the same time and keep your own skills sharp.

As a combat engineer, I never sent my men over the bridge we built until I ensured the bridge was complete. So, too, you need

to ensure the task has been completed before moving forward with other plans.

## 8. APPRECIATE YOUR OWN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Through innate abilities or skills developed, we discover what we are really good at and what we are not. Knowing your own strengths and weaknesses is important because it allows you to surround yourself with a team of people who are proficient in areas where you are less skilful. Conversely, their weaknesses will be your strengths.

**Given the mayhem out there, strong leadership is more essential than ever.**

By developing complementary relationships with others, you can leverage their strengths and yours. This could be as simple as asking for feedback on an incentive program because you are not as creative as others or having someone on your team who has strong writing skills to proofread an important email before you send it out to your advisors. Admitting weakness in a certain area and asking for support shows strength and helps to create a collaborative team.

## 9. MAKE SOUND PLANS AND TIMELY DECISIONS

In the modern business environment, the speed and dynamics require us to control what we can and prepare for everything else. During the Second World War, General Patton once said, "A good plan on time is better than a great plan late." You may have witnessed a detailed and inspiring business plan created in January but not introduced until March and never looked at again. Without implementation, like a financial plan for a client, the plan is worthless.

A leader's role is to give direction to the group and make decisions, so *make* the call *when* it needs to be made.

## 10. LEAD BY EXAMPLE

This is the master principle and the king of the other nine. If you don't get this right, nothing else matters. Once you accept a leadership position, you give up the right to have a bad day. Others in your office are watching you, judging the situation at hand and basing their reactions largely on your behaviour and actions.

Genghis Kahn was arguably one of history's most powerful leaders. His troops followed him passionately — not because he created a power base steeped in fear, but because he would share his followers' hardships and not ask them to do things he would not be willing to do himself. This behaviour inspired the men. For example, when his troops had no water, he stood up in front of them and emptied out his canteen as a symbol of trust and a way to say he shared their suffering.

There are several attributes shared by good soldiers and good leaders alike: the first is *integrity* — refuse to deceive others or yourself. Your behaviour must be congruent with your intentions; the second is *courage* — have the willingness to face hardship and do the job others would withdraw from; and, finally, *loyalty* — this applies to both directions of the chain of command. Without supporting those above you and those who rely on your strength, the system falls apart. **F**

GREG POWELL, CFP, is a financial centre manager for Sun Life in British Columbia. The views of the author do not necessarily reflect those of Sun Life Financial. Greg can be reached at [gregory.powell@sunlife.com](mailto:gregory.powell@sunlife.com).

GAMA International Canada is a conference of *Advocis* and provides professional development and networking opportunities for leaders in the financial services industry.