

POINTER Monograph No. 8
A Reader for Leadership Development

CALLED TO LEAD

A READER FOR ASPIRING SAF LEADERS

CALLED TO LEAD

To answer the call to lead in the SAF is to begin a journey. One must first be comfortable venturing alone in the wilderness before the received wisdom of others can find its proper place as one's companion and guide. This book contains the accounts of senior officers but is meant to be of use to officers at every level. The journeys of these senior officers to their pinnacle ranks and appointments exemplify the breadth and depth of experience available to guide all who choose to obey the call to lead. Their stories resonate with all who answer the call to lead as these stories reflect fundamental truisms regarding the military profession.



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Called To Lead

A Reader for Aspiring SAF Leaders



A Publication of the Singapore Armed Forces

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Published by

POINTER: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces
SAFTI Military Institute
500 Upper Jurong Road
Singapore 638364
www.mindef.gov.sg/safti/pointer

Graphic and Layout Designer MR Samuel Kwan
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First published in 2011

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ISSN 2017-3956

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BG(NS) Lim Teck Yin

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ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM

CPT (NS) NG ZHI-WEN was commissioned as an Infantry Officer in January 2000, and went on to become a Guards Leader in the same year. His last appointment in service was as a Field Psychologist in the SAF Centre for Leadership Development. He is the main author of the book.

LTC ADRIAN CHAN, PhD, was commissioned as an Infantry Officer in January 1991. He currently serves as a Team Leader in the SAF Centre for Leadership Development, where he has focused on nurturing junior officers and on establishing feedback and other measurement mechanisms for leadership development across the SAF. LTC Adrian's direct (and indirect) leadership has been critical in orchestrating the production of this book.

COL SUKHMINDER SINGH was commissioned as an Infantry Officer in October 1977, and went on to convert to a Commando in January 1978. He currently serves as the Head of the SAF Centre for Leadership Development, which provides dedicated support for Leadership and Command Development for all SAF leaders. COL Sukh conceived the idea for this book, laid the foundations for it to be realised, and gave his unwavering support until its completion. His personal reflections round off this book.

BG (NS) LIM TECK YIN was commissioned as an Infantry Officer in December 1981, and went on to convert to a Commando in September 1982. At the time of writing, he served as the Commandant of SAFTI Military Institute, whereby he played a leading role in the nurturing of the SAF Officer Corps. Besides penning the *Foreword*, BG Lim was instrumental in conceiving and leading the project to capture the leadership insights and stories of former senior officers in the SAF. The fruits of that project form the basis of this book.

FOREWORD

Theories of leadership abound, but none are so compelling for the SAF as those espoused by the leaders that have been featured in this book.

Theirs is the conviction of tried and tested ways, not always leading to success, but always bringing forth valuable lessons and forging belief. It is this same conviction that moved them to avail themselves for what was originally an oral history project conducted by a group of young SAF officers. The project threw up many insights, and not surprisingly, most of these were about leading in the SAF and leading the SAF.

The interviewers came back with inspired accounts of their interviewees' enthusiasm to share and to pass on their knowledge and wisdom.

This was perhaps, for them, the most important leadership lesson of all: that the value underpinning leadership in the SAF is the authentic care and nurturing of those whom we lead.

These accounts in turn prompted the idea for this book – a piece of “heart-work” that has been painstakingly put together by the authors who I know believe that “values cannot be taught, but must be caught.” They saw the potential of the material that had been gathered to inspire and to guide a much wider audience of SAF leaders. They exercised their leadership through a determined effort to organise the thoughts and ideas and have presented them in a simple but compelling format.

This book contains the accounts of senior officers, but is relevant for officers at every level. Their journeys to their pinnacle ranks and appointments provided the breadth and depth of experience that is evident here, but I believe that their stories would resonate with junior and senior officers alike as they are born out of fundamental truths. This book therefore serves to help us clarify our own thoughts and convictions on leadership and to provide us with a platform to enhance our journey.

When I was the Commandant of SAFTI Military Institute, I have often been asked what is meant by the “Home of the Officer Corps”. I believe that the “Home of the Officer Corps” is about officers encouraging and nurturing fellow officers, so that ordinary men can be extraordinary leaders in service of the SAF and the nation. I hope that you will view this book in that light and be inspired to contribute in due course to its sequels.

BG (NS) Lim Teck Yin
Comdt, SAFTI MI
(14 August 2009-23 March 2011)
March 2011

* At the time of writing, BG (NS) Lim Teck Yin was Commandant SAFTI MI

Chapter 1

Finishing Well

THE FAREWELL

Typically, who and how many people turn up for your farewell is a useful indication of how you have performed as a leader. What is said by others during your farewell may say more. How others continue to speak about you after you are gone is even more telling. When Lieutenant-General (LG) Lim Chuan Poh, former Chief of Defence Force (CDF), had his farewell dinner, former Chief of Air Force (CAF), Major-General (MG) Rocky Lim gave a speech for LG Lim. MG Lim said, “Yes, we know the CDF, we know each other very well, but I really felt his leadership when we had to deal with 9/11.” He continues to be remembered for his leadership.

When Brigadier-General (BG) Winston Toh bade farewell to 9th Division (he was Commander for three years) and was concurrently stepping down from regular military service, his Division officers gave him a book filled with stories of his time in command. His Warrant Officers gave him another personalised book. Another officer wrote him a third! Three books paid tribute to a general who, throughout his career, had personified *Care for Soldiers*. He continues to be remembered for his care for soldiers.

What do you want to be said of you at your farewell? When people are no longer under your formal leadership, what would they then say then? Would they speak positively about your leadership? Would they want to publish something in tribute to you?

These questions were not posed to encourage you to become a populist, but to get you thinking about what you want to establish as your **leadership legacy**. It is helpful to start well on your military leadership journey, yet it is far more important to be able to finish well. To do both, one must begin with the end in mind.

DEDICATION

This book is written for those who are serious about starting well and finishing well.¹ It is written especially for the SAF officer who is serious as a student in the art and science of military leadership, and who believes that everyone who serves under him deserves the best leadership that he can give.

Therefore, ***this book is dedicated to all the men and women in uniform who we as leaders lead and serve.***

1. We also hope that mid-career officers will find this book useful.

THE CASE FOR GOOD LEADERSHIP

The SAF is constantly evolving and progressing to keep pace with the changing world. It has to keep “rediscovering” its need for good leadership at every level in the chain of command, and in offices of every branch and department. On a personal note, as a member of the SAF, you will soon discover that what was drilled into you in your “beginner days” at Officer Cadet School about the importance of leadership will ring true at every stage of your career.

Consider any endeavour or project that the SAF is undertaking, and you will find that it stands or falls by the quality of the organisation’s leadership. Take any issue of importance in the SAF, study it from every possible angle and you will find that a central part of the *problem* or the *solution* (depending on how you see it) boils down to the need for good leadership at all levels in the Organisation. When you examine the challenges that you have faced in the SAF thus far, can you see how good leadership might have overcome a significant part of them?

There are four fundamental facts about the SAF that drive the case for good leadership:

First, the SAF’s *mission* demands that it will have to put its people in the line of fire at the risk of life and limb. Some have characterised military service as having “unlimited liability” – onerous and often dangerous – both in peacetime and operations. The decision to commit our people to endure or even embrace such a life is never easily taken. Sustaining our people’s willingness to persevere through such hardship and actually step into the line of fire when duty calls is even more difficult. Perhaps the hard-

est challenge will be when lives under your command have been lost in the course of duty. Not everybody can bear that kind of responsibility. We must have able leaders who can galvanize our people to give their lives in the defence of our nation.

Second, the SAF has an *all-encompassing purpose* that needs to be negotiated against a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment.² When you study the SAF’s mission statement, you can break it down into three basic components – *Diplomacy*, *Deterrence*, and a swift and decisive *Victory*.³ These components may sound straightforward on paper. But given today’s VUCA environment, it is a real headache to further distill and translate these mission requirements into real policies, real capabilities, and the conduct of operations (which are always real). SAF leaders must possess the insight to discern what must be done in every situation that crops up in the foreseeable future. Without leaders, the SAF cannot fulfil its mission to safeguard our nation.

Third, the SAF is a *people organisation*. Soldiers, sailors, and airmen comprise the backbone of the SAF. Its people are its greatest and most precious asset – all 355,000 of the active and NS personnel in its ORBAT. These people can only be organised, trained, and managed by other people; and to bring out the best in them, they must be led by good leaders.

Furthermore, consider that the regular corps is at the heart of the SAF’s fighting force. Practically every regular personnel who joins

2. VUCA is a military acronym that stands for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. It is often used to describe today’s tactical, operational or strategic landscape.

3. The mission of the SAF is to enhance Singapore’s peace and security through deterrence and diplomacy, and should these fail, to secure a swift and decisive victory over the aggressor.

the SAF has to work his way up the ranks – he SAF cannot easily transplant mid-career cross-overs from the rest of society. What would it take to inspire our young servicemen to commit themselves to a military career in the regular corps, and to nurture them to become the future leaders of the SAF? Nothing less than good leadership.

Finally, the SAF is a complex organisation.

Some people have described it as an eco-system with many interdependent individual organisms. Others picture the SAF as a body with various organs and tissue. An organ cannot say that it has no need of another. Neither can all the organs desire to do the same thing. But each of the diverse parts has a unique role to play, and yet all have to work and move together in a tight and coherent direction in order to survive and to thrive. How is it possible to steer such an organisation? It has often been said that “structure drives behaviour”, but that would only be at best a part of the solution. We need enlightened visionary leadership to touch people’s hearts, rally them together and move forward as one.

It is clear then that the resolve to develop and sustain excellent leadership in the SAF must be consistently renewed. Senior leaders in the SAF have written at length regarding leadership.⁴ However, such resolve and renewal cannot be borne by the organisation’s senior leadership alone. It must be the personal concern of each leader within the SAF to take charge of his own leadership development. This book is written to help you as a leader in your personal learning journey.

Leadership is all about people. You can do great things, but in the process destroy people. That’s not leadership. Leadership is when you can make people do great things.

BG Ravinder Singh

4. Examples include: Kuek, Desmond, Chee Khern, Ng, Kian Hong, Neo, & Men Leong, Chew, *POINTER Supplement: Reflections on Leadership* (Jul 2009); and Chee Khern, Ng, *POINTER Supplement: On Command* (Nov 2009).

BEING AN OFFICER: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADING, MANAGING AND BEING IN COMMAND

An officer must master the arts of leading, managing and being in command.

LEADER

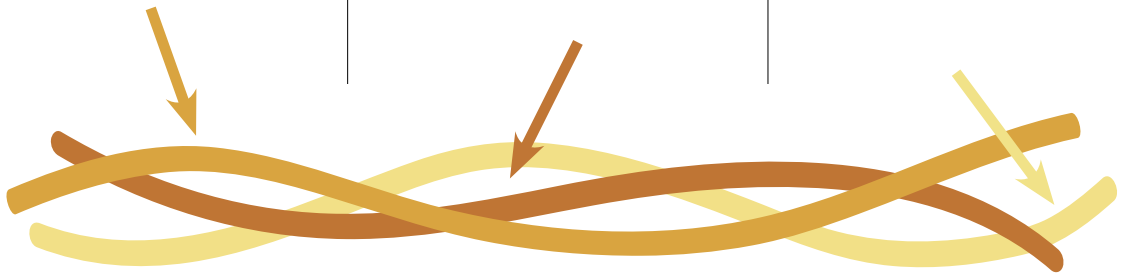
A leader influences people to accomplish a common purpose (“Who are we and what are we here to do?”). He is concerned with the “intangibles” (For example, Vision, Confidence, Commitment and Cohesion).

MANAGER

A manager organises and coordinates activities to accomplish organisational objectives. He manages the “tangibles” (For example, Manpower, Finance, Logistics and other Resources). He concerns himself with how the group should go where they want to go.

COMMANDER

A commander is an individual formally vested with authority (by virtue of rank or assignment) and responsibility to plan, organise, direct, coordinate and control forces subordinate to him. He is also responsible for the welfare of the personnel under him.



An officer is a manager by the functions he performs, a commander by the authority and responsibility attached to his appointment and fundamentally, a leader by all he stands for.

Some commanders may not be good leaders – they rely on command authority and compliance to get things done, but people may not wish to follow them when they no longer wield command authority.

A good manager must also lead well – in order to successfully accomplish organisational objectives in ways that build up the organisation and its people, he **must** be able to positively influence his followers.

A good commander must be a good leader – good leadership influences people to respond favourably to command authority. He must also be a good manager, to be able to translate his vision into reality.

Good leadership is fundamental to good command, and management.

HOW DO LEADERS GROW AS LEADERS?

Good leadership is not a given.

It is not difficult to imagine how someone can be in a position of authority yet deliver negative leadership values to his followers. A title of authority can be given and obedience demanded. But respect as a leader must be earned.

One's personal leadership always needs to be developed. Even if you were blessed with talents and traits that can contribute to good leadership, your true potential cannot be realised unless you have learned how to use them well.

There are three main ways to develop your leadership. Someone may have **taught** you. You may have **caught** it from others. Or you may have personally **exercised** leadership and learned from the experience.

To be an effective leader, you need to expose yourself as much as possible to all three *methods of learning*.

The three methods function together much like the OODA (Observe-Orient-Decide-Act) loop.⁵ What you have been taught and what you have caught will contribute to building up your personal storehouse of insights and instincts. These insights and instincts are the material that you will use to craft your leadership philosophy, which will influence

how you approach any given leadership situation.⁶ This is akin to the *Observe and Orient* stages of the OODA loop. In the midst of a crisis, your insights and instincts will guide you as you continue to make sense of the situation and make decisions.

Only by exercising your own leadership (which is to *Decide and Act*) can you step forward in defining yourself as a leader (having figured out what works and what does not) and refining your leadership philosophy in the school of reality. This is the *loop back*.

HOW THIS BOOK CAN SERVE YOU AS A LEADER

The stories about LG Lim Chuan Poh and BG Winston Toh's farewell events, which we recounted at the beginning of this chapter, came out of a series of interviews conducted between each of them and a small team of junior SAF officers. These young officers were still in the midst of their studies, but they had a passion to learn about military leadership.

Those two interviews were part of a larger project to capture the insights and experiences of former SAF senior officers who had attained flag rank. Each of these senior officers was individually interviewed for at least 2.5 hours. Some even invited their young interviewers for a second round as they had more to share. Subsequently, the young officers who interviewed these seniors (all eleven of them) laboured to transcribe all the interviews.

5. The OODA loop is a concept of decision-making usually at the operational or strategic level. It basically conceptualises decision-making as taking place in recurring cycles of Observe-Orient-Decide-Act. The OODA loop was developed by military strategist and US Air Force COL John Boyd.
6. Your leadership philosophy is your set of beliefs about what it means to be a good leader. It usually expresses your vision for yourself ("What kind of a leader do I want to be?"), your values, and your expectations of those you lead. Portions of your philosophy would be enduring, while other portions may be adjusted according to context.

These transcripts reflect the experiences of these senior officers (henceforth called “interviewees”), who have walked their respective leadership journeys and excelled. Yet, the stories and lessons that they share point to common principles that they believe to be fundamental for anyone who wants to be a leader in the SAF.

Staff from the SAF Centre for Leadership Development went through the interview transcripts and reports to compile and analyse the stories and lessons to derive these principles of leadership. They also compared the insights from the interviewees with the leadership content and processes being used

in leadership development programs for Stage 1 officers (up to CPT level), as well as the feedback received from participants in these programs.⁷ With this triangulation, the staff felt sufficiently assured that the insights gathered would be useful for the broader SAF population of leaders. These staff became the authors of this book.

This book was written to identify and discuss principles derived from these interviews in a manner that would be relevant to any leader in the SAF, but especially for junior leaders (up to CPT level). This book gives an extensive treatment of leadership concepts and rules of thumb that have become staples in the SAF

THREE WAYS TO LEARN LEADERSHIP

“TAUGHT” – You learn by reading or listening to someone else instructing you about leadership – their thoughts, theories, and stories. The more you read and listen to others, the greater the breadth of insight you gain.

“CAUGHT” – You adopt a role model and learn by working closely with him and observing him. Sometimes, you may also immerse yourself in a particular environment, “catch” the unspoken values and ways of thinking in that environment (you will notice what you have caught most starkly after spending a good deal of time training under a great foreign military). Learning by “catching” yields depth of insight about leadership.

“EXERCISED” – Your leadership is like a muscle: it develops when you use it. Exercising leadership is when you get to practice all that you have been taught and caught from others. For all the excellent training that you receive in Officer Cadet School, the real test is when you put your boots on the ground and serve a full tour of duty leading actual people. There is no end to gaining more experience, but the reality is that most leaders will get only one chance to exercise a particular level of command and to do well in it. Therefore, every opportunity to exercise leadership is precious, and you should prepare yourself well to exploit the learning value of each one.

7. These programs are the Undergraduate Professional Military Education and Training (UGPMET) leadership modules as well as the SAF Scholar Leadership Development Program (SLDP).

lingo – terms such as “the military profession”, “leadership presence”, and “direct and indirect leadership”. You may have heard some of them before and wondered what they meant. After reading this book, you should have a better grasp of these concepts.

However, we stress that a deep understanding of leadership principles and concepts can only be acquired through personal experience. You will only grow when you have absorbed some of the lessons into your own leadership philosophy and applied them in your own leadership journey.

A GUIDED TOUR OF LEADERSHIP

You may expand on the idea of a leadership journey, and think of this book as a “Guided Tour of Leadership”: you find yourself having to “topo” through a vast terrain – the world of being a leader in the SAF. This terrain is large and varied. Being vast, it also has much area remaining to be charted. Parts of the landscape are still changing, but the destination remains unchanged – it has been marked “Finished Well”.

Fortunately, others have gone ahead of you and blazed trails throughout the terrain. They made it to the end and have finished well.

The time for your own journey has come. This leadership book is written to aid you as you plot your path. You may think of it serving you as:

1. A Map, to highlight and explain the trails blazed by others and, to help you in your own journey.
2. A Survivor’s Guide, for you to endure the long haul. Leadership is a lifelong journey.
3. A Compass, to give direction, and to remind you of the inner compass that guides your actions.

We invite you to journey on as a lifelong student of leadership, and perhaps in the future your own experiences can be included in a book that someone else will read and be inspired by.

Right: You find yourself having to “topo” through a vast terrain – the world of being a leader in the SAF.



HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANISED

The contents of this book follow a logical sequence that is based on the SAF 24/7 Leadership Framework.⁸

Chapter 2 paints the “circle” – it describes the SAF’s leadership context and what it means to be a military professional. We will discuss how that shapes the essence of leadership in the SAF.

Once the context is established, we can then begin to examine the building blocks of leadership within the person (the “triangle”).

Chapter 3 will simultaneously address the pinnacle (“Self”) and the base (“Values”) – these two building blocks go hand in hand and are fundamental to any leader’s development.

Chapter 4 facilitates the transition towards a discussion on the “Styles” and “Competencies” required of leaders.

Chapters 5 and 6 will address the ingredients (“Styles” and “Competencies”) that lend flavour to direct leadership and indirect leadership. Your ability to effectively wield both forms of leadership will be key success factors at all levels of leadership.

Chapter 7 will conclude this book with a discussion on leadership as a Staff Officer. You must recognise that being a Staff Officer does not imply that you revert to being a “follower”. In many important ways, being a Staff Officer will offer opportunities for you to exercise leadership. In this chapter, we will also discuss additional considerations when you hold a formal staff leadership position (i.e. Branch Head, Department Head, etc.).

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Let us begin by suggesting how not to read this book:

1. Do not be proud and presume that you already know everything about leadership. Neither the authors of this book nor the senior officers who were interviewed felt that they had grasped everything.
2. Do not focus only on the parts that seem relevant to you “here and now”. It is an unnecessary and unhelpful way of limiting your own learning for what would be a lifelong journey.
3. Do not speed-read. Do not be like one who forgets all that he had read the moment he closes the book.

Rather, we suggest that you do the following as you dive into the text – these are habits that go along with the discipline of reflecting deeply:

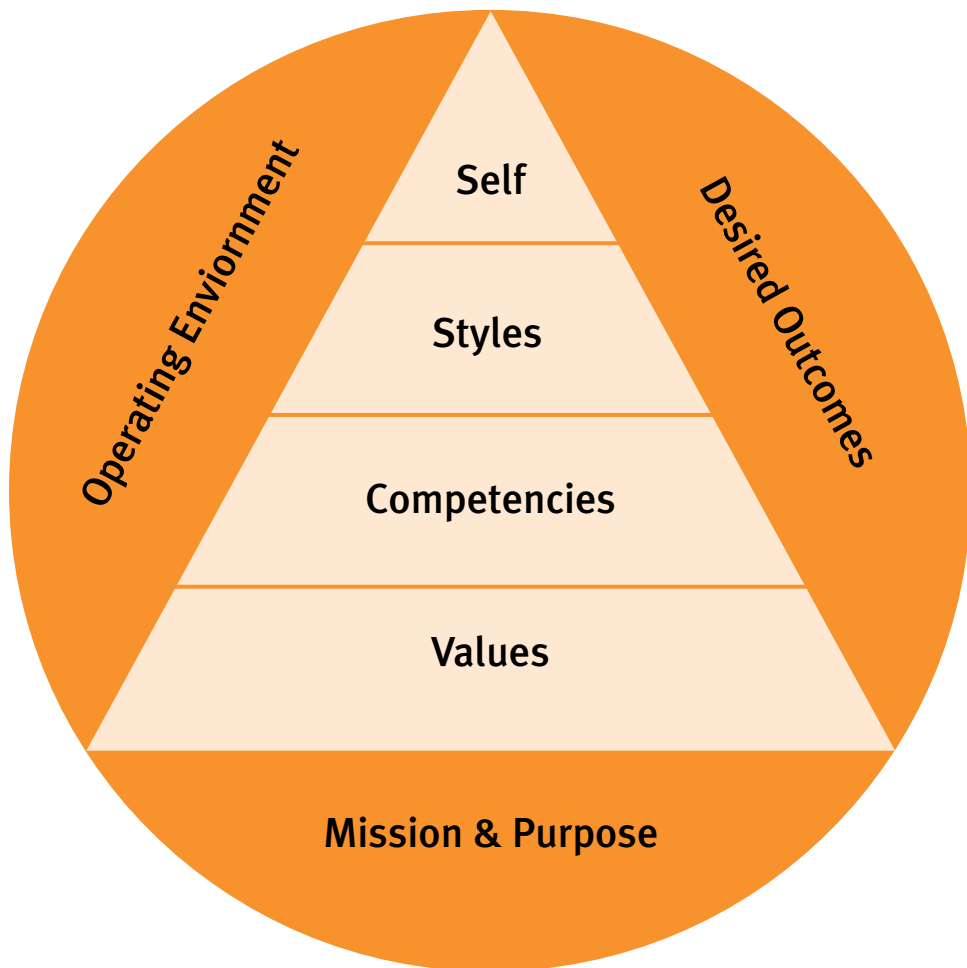
1. Read with a pencil in hand and annotate liberally.
2. Connect your own stories to what you have read.
3. Share your reflections with others. Make this book a vehicle for conversations that matter with those who matter to you.

May this book help you to start off well on your leadership journey. More importantly, may you finish well!

8. We refer you to the Centre for Leadership Development internet website for a more in-depth presentation of the SAF 24/7 Leadership Framework.
http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/atozlistings/saftimi/units/cld/keyideas/framework.html

THE SAF 24/7 LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

The SAF 24/7 Leadership Framework is a framework for thinking and talking about leadership.



The triangle specifies the building blocks of what is needed for effective leadership.



The circle emphasises that SAF leaders must lead with a good understanding of the context – the SAF's mission and purpose, operating environment, and desired outcomes.

The Discipline of Always Learning

I don't know what reflection means to you, but the discipline of always learning is something important. If you don't listen to feedback, you'll never improve, and it's a tough thing for people. Unless you hear good and bad things about your leadership you'll never improve. Therefore, reflecting is an important discipline; having a debrief, an AAR, so that you can see things from others' perspective. Senior leadership is indirect. So if all you can see are things happening around you, how would you know what is going wrong on the ground? Hence, you always have to ask, whether (things) could have been done better. If there are shortcomings then it's because of you, your staff, and the subordinate commanders. It requires humility and the willingness to listen to bad news. As an individual you must always learn and reflect, and the organisation must be a learning one. Without that, you cannot learn from your mistakes or success. Frankly, you learn more from mistakes, but learning from mistakes is hard because acknowledging a shortcoming is hard.

LG Ng Yat Chung

Sir, why did you sign on?

... For a young man it was an honourable career and it sounded exciting, and for me it was really an opportunity to get a tertiary education. There were not many choices open to me in the late 70s. The alternative for me was to be a technician, possibly in the RSAF. As it turned out, I enjoyed and loved the military career and never got round to leaving.

LG Ng Yat Chung

I joined the SAF because I wanted to be a soldier and a leader. I guess in some ways it's related to what I did when I was in school. I was in NCC (Sea) when I was in secondary school and I knew from that experience that I enjoyed leading and getting things done. When I was offered the SAF scholarship, it was very much in line with what I wanted to do... So for me it was a natural choice.

BG Ravinder Singh

I did not really start off wanting to join the Navy when I did my 'A' levels and I was not able to secure a scholarship. What was staring at me in the face was of course National Service. So... I didn't really want to spend two and a half years, three years at that time... in the Army because I did not have the interest. So I thought I would join the Air Force and become a pilot. It was a good profession and I had some interest in things mechanical, I always wanted to be engineer. Since I could not go to the university, I applied to become a pilot. I went through all the tests. So many different tests, physical, mental, IQ etc. Until the last test, eyesight, everything passed. But the last thing I couldn't do was that I couldn't depress

the pedal of the Hawker Hunter far enough, I couldn't lower the flaps enough to stop the plane perhaps. So because of that I could not qualify to become a pilot. I mean for today's plane, no problem! But the Hunter was really built for the Europeans so they needed longer legs. So when I was at Central Manpower Base they told me "You can't be a pilot. Would you like to be a Midshipman?" So I said, "What's a Midshipman?", and the recruitment officer was also Army officer 1a! He said, "I don't know. Something in the Navy. Officers." So I said "Ok! Put my application in for Midshipman."

RADM Kwek Siew Jin

I don't know about you all, but when I was young, I was quite blur. So it was quite simple for me. There were a few factors (why I signed on). One, I was quite clear what I didn't want. I was quite clear I didn't want to be bounded to a desk job for a long time. I was also quite clear I didn't want to do business at that point in time. So when the opportunity came along, I thought it was something worthwhile, that I could do for a while. So it was quite simple..... I was quite clear that I wanted a job that would not bound me to a very fixed routine, or fixed timetable, or fixed job scope, so that seemed to fit and that was how it started.

RADM Tan Kai Hoe

When I passed out from OCS, I was awarded the best trainee in Delta Company, OCS. I then went for Commando/Guards Conversion Course and was the best PT and the Top Trainee. We did a 10 km test in SBO, complete with SOC, finishing at the ramp obstacle. I did it in about 55 minutes. After that all my Kakis (buddies), all 17 of us were posted to the 1st mono intake 3rd Battalion Singapore Guards. I did very well and was awarded the Best Platoon Commander. I then ORD-ed for 11 days and had

my red IC for 11 days. I was selling insurance. I had this feeling that I'm begging people for a bowl of rice. I was not too happy with the job then. Just then my CO called and asked me, "Eh how are you doing? Why don't you come back to the SAF?" That's how I came back and signed on with the SAF. This is an example of how sometimes a commander may identify and encourage soldiers to be regulars.

BG Winston Toh

I was enlisted in end 1974, Boxing Day 1974, and completed my National Service full time. Almost at the end of the two and a half years National Service, I signed on. That was about 1976. So, why did I sign on... If I may put it in crisp form, number 1: the need. I needed a job, to support my family then. Number two: the inclination, meaning that I felt through serving my national service, having been commissioned, having led as a platoon commander, having been through overseas exercises, battalion exercises and so on, and having seen the

way that I was able to perform in the military field related work, and having seen the effects of men and also superiors telling me that I should sign on;... I think I had the inclination for the military. So, there was this interest in the work, the yearning for adventure, which was reason number two. And number three: a sense of purpose, and indeed a tinge of duty, honour, country. So, reasons for joining the Army: need, inclination, a sense of purpose.

BG Ong Boon Hwee

And Sir, why did you stay on?

As you progress in the Army, as you grow in your career, as you move into different aspects of jobs, as you get to understand the profession more and more, understand the SAF more and more, the country more and more; ...that sense of purpose tends to grow on you. And this was what happened to me. So by the time we tackle this question of why do I stay, the order has changed. The sense of purpose became reason number one, and of course, as you grow, you also realise more the effects that you could have, and it is linked to the sense of purpose, that you can then be able, in whatever small contribution, influence and make a difference. That gives a lot of job satisfaction.

Now, if you drill down, beyond that, just purely having a sense of purpose won't work if you find the job dull, if you find it a drag, like each morning you drag yourself out of bed, the meaning itself won't keep you going. You need to enjoy your work, because when you go to work each morning, or when you go to the field, you would find that military work is very onerous. There must also be this sense that yes tough as it may be, it is also enjoyable work. Well, there is nothing wrong to say that military work is to be enjoyed.

... So, all said, why I stayed in Army, I felt more and more the sense of purpose, and the meaningful and rewarding career came to the forefront. And that made it a very good journey. And that's why at the end of my 27 years career, capping it with NDP 2002, I was able to sincerely share in my farewell parade speech, about this sense of purpose and a rewarding journey.

BG Ong Boon Hwee

The question is whether there was a constant purpose throughout my career in the Army that kept me going. For me it was not difficult. Humans need a vision and a goal to remain engaged and to inspire them and give them something to look forward to. Throughout my career I have always had something to look forward to, something that inspired me.

I continued to find meaning in what I did and there were many challenges along the way which inspired me and drove me. At every point in your career you discover something about yourself and the organisation. You have to realign yourself and then look ahead at the next set of challenges and move on.

A career in the SAF is a long career. 20 years is a long time and in the process you change and the organisation changes. It's important to have a set of values that are aligned to the SAF and remain unchanging over time. If you want to serve your country, you want to do your best and you are prepared to adapt to the SAF, then there is a good chance you will fit in the SAF. In the first few years of his career a young officer will know if he is aligned to the vision, mission and values of the SAF. If you feel your values and purpose are not aligned to the SAF; then there is nothing to be ashamed of; you just have to move on. If you have the alignment in values and purpose and you look around at the senior leadership and say, "Yes, I want to be a commander like him", then you will probably have no difficulties fitting into the SAF.

BG Ravinder Singh

After a while, it shifts. The personal part is always there. We are all made up such that we will always want to improve and learn, otherwise we won't be here right? Probably you have done well in studies and so on, it means that you are well motivated, so I think that is the part, it is personal, and it is always there. So always wanting to grow, develop, do the best you can, learn on the job, and be ready for the next set of responsibility. I think that is a given.

You might not think of it at this stage, I think at some point, you will begin to identify with the organisation. At some point when people say, "Navy!" you think, "That's me." So when somebody says something not so good about the Navy, you feel it...At some point in time, you realise that this Navy is your Navy and it's well before the time that you are Chief of Navy. It shouldn't be only at that time, otherwise the Navy is only owned by one person. So then, this is your Navy, what you do impacts it, whether you do more or you do less makes a difference to whether it progresses or improves as an organisation or not. I don't know when the point is, whether you are Major, Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, whatever, but somewhere along the way, it is a gradual, maybe almost an unconscious process.

RADM Ronnie Tay

There were different points where I searched deeply as to whether the SAF was for me, and whether I should do something else, and each time I came to the conclusion that it was much better for me to stay on in the SAF.

LG Lim Chuan Poh

The SAF is not a civilian corporation...

*We begin by acknowledging that the professional officer
is first and foremost a leader and not a manager.*

Then-COL Peter Ho

Chairman Value System Committee, 1987

Chapter 2

The Call to Lead

DISCOVERING THE CALL

Why did you sign on?

Can you recall what it felt like? What were the considerations on your mind when you made that decision?

As you read the stories of how some of the interviewees had signed on, you will find that there was no one correct or acceptable way. They came on account of the opportunity to study, to pursue a preferred lifestyle, or because someone they respected convinced them, because they thought they could do well in a military career. Perhaps, there was also a sense of duty, coupled with the desire to do something meaningful with their lives.

What happened after you signed on? What has kept you staying on?

Again, going by the experiences of our interviewees, there tend to be a “growing into” the work and into the organisation. They came to realise along the way what the organisation stood for, and what it meant to be in uniform, and they adjusted themselves accordingly. It is not how or where you started from, but how you journey on and finish that really matters.

It is quite like the experience of being commissioned as an officer. You get admitted only once into the officer fraternity, but you never start off fully used to it. Usually, the first adjustment is letting your esteemed OCS Wing Sergeant Major call you “Sir”. Then you get posted to a unit, a squadron or a ship. It’s your first posting and you get your hands dirty doing your job, learning as you go along. You do not start off perfect

for the appointment, but you grow into it. You discover, re-discover, or even re-make yourself along the way.

As you spend more time in uniform, you gradually discover more about the organisation – There are so many addressees on the OA and you don’t recognise over half of them. You have access to more classified papers, and you talk to more people. You find yourself involved in organizing massive events, such as the National Day Parade, Multi-national/Multi-agency exercises, even preparing for and going into Operations. It is not long before you realise that beyond your unit, aircraft or ship lies the vast world of the SAF. You discover more about what it really means for you to be a member of the SAF, and that it goes beyond just drawing a regular pay-check and having job security. It becomes more real.

Have you felt that tension? Does it make you uncomfortable?

We take it as fundamental that every SAF military leader must grasp that he is in a career as well as a profession. It is fundamental because it concerns your identity. Career and profession is a natural combination, but in many ways, there are important points of difference. Everyone must come to grips with it. This is because you collectively define how the organisation will respond to the different demands of a military profession and the profession as a career. At the same time, in the course of your work you may hear other voices pulling you in different directions. We must stress that this will be an on-going tension to work through in your journey; it does not get resolved once and for all the moment you signed on.

Some will find this easy to do. Others will go through a period of struggle, but all must go through it if they will ever stay on, go far, and find fulfilment in what they do in the SAF. Furthermore, the clearer you are about your identity as a military professional in the SAF, the more you will find yourself equipped with a reliable compass to guide your decisions and actions and of those you lead in your leadership journey.

This chapter examines the nature of the military profession in the SAF, and what that means as a leader. We trust that you will see why we want to devote so much attention to this important matter.

THE PROFESSION

Let's begin by looking at definitions.

Career

The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines "Career" as a job, or series of jobs that you do during your working life, especially if you continue to get better jobs and better pay. Interestingly, the term "Career" comes from the Latin word "Carrera", which means race – and therefore, an over-emphasis on one's career is really to be caught up in a rat race.

Vocation

A vocation is a type of work that you feel suited to doing and to which you give much of your time and energy.¹

The term comes from the Latin word "vocare"², which is a verb that means "to call". This carries the idea of an occupation that you do because you feel drawn to it or you feel specially suited for it – there was a sense of calling to it.

Profession

We define a **profession as a vocation that requires special training or skill**. It is done for a direct and definite compensation, but without expectation of other business gain.³ Amateurs do a similar work but are not paid. Professionals let that work become their livelihood. They let it become a significant part of their identity.

What defines a professional identity? What is implied by being a professional? We can suggest a few key ideas (See Table 2.1. for elaboration)

- CALLING
- TRUST
- EXPERTISE
- MORAL CODE
- COMMUNITY
- COMMITMENT
- MENTORING

1. Adapted from the definition provided in the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary.
2. Reference: Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, 1985)
3. Adapted from the "New Statesman", 21 April 1917, an article by Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, and cited with approval in: UK Competition Commission, "Architects' Services: A Report on the Supply of Architects' Services with Reference to Scale Fees", 8 November 1977, p.44, available at <http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/rep_pub/reports/1976_1979/108architects.htm>. (Accessed 5 Apr 2011)

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROFESSIONAL AND, SPECIFICALLY, A LEADER IN THE MILITARY PROFESSION

Table 2.1

	As a Professional	As a Leader in the Military Profession
CALLING	By definition, it is vocational. Therefore, being a professional carries a sense of calling – a strong inclination or even a sense of duty to perform that occupation.	You have strong alignment with what the SAF stands for and requires of its military professionals. You influence others to discern and clarify their own calling.
TRUST	You are entrusted to do something that only you can do, either by a client or by society in general who deems this service to be necessary.	You are part of an organisation entrusted by society with its defence. You influence others to accomplish the mission entrusted by the organisation and by society.
EXPERTISE	You are distinguished by specialised training and education that enable you to do what you have been entrusted with. Implied is the idea that you ought to constantly “sharpen your sword” to be an expert (or “professional”) in what you do.	You are specially trained in the military arts and sciences. You influence others to grow greater expertise in their military professional skill. You develop in your knowledge and skill of being a leader; and you broaden your knowledge of those whom you lead.
MORAL CODE	Given that you have been entrusted with a specific work, which usually requires that you put the interest of the client or of society above your own, you are regulated by a strict moral code of conduct. This code helps you to uphold the trust placed in you.	You embody the SAF Core Values, and influence others to decide and to act accordingly. Furthermore, you are prepared to be selfless and sacrificial, as much as you expect it of your followers.

	As a Professional	As a Leader in the Military Profession
COMMUNITY	You are not alone. “You are a member of, and therefore accountable to, a professional community. There is a special bond among those in the same profession.	You are a member of the SAF officer corps. You contribute to building up and improving the SAF in the long-term. You influence others to do the same.
COMMITMENT	You are individually responsible for upholding what defines or is core to the profession, and to act in the interest of your professional community. You help to create and maintain the ethos of the profession.	You are committed to the SAF. You inspire the commitment of others to the SAF.
MENTORING	Within this community, those recognised as experienced experts are expected to nurture and develop junior members of the profession.	You nurture and develop other military leaders, who will one day go on to influence others.

Given these ideas, we pose to you this question:
 What does it mean for you to be a member of
 the profession of arms?

Q

How much of a professional am I? A Self-Appraisal

How would you respond to each of the following questions?



CALLING

Q. How strong is your inclination to serve in the SAF?

Q. How strong is your sense of duty to serve in the SAF?

TRUST

Q. How important is the role of the SAF in defending Singapore?

Q. If a civilian asked you what you did in your profession and why did it matter, what would you say?

EXPERTISE

Q. What is your specialty as a military professional?

Q. How much attention do you pay to improving and expanding your specialty skill as a military professional?

MORAL CODE

Q. How aligned are you with each of the SAF Core Values?

Q. How much do you strive to abide by the SAF Code of Conduct?

Q. How much do you strive to live according to the Officer's Creed?

COMMUNITY

Q. Who do you talk to concerning issues in your professional work?

Q. Who are you accountable to as a professional?

COMMITMENT

Q. How do you uphold the profession in your current appointment?

MENTORING

Q. Who has been influential in nurturing your professional development?

Q. Who in the profession are you currently nurturing?

BEYOND THE MISSION – THE TRUE PROFESSIONAL CALLING

The mission of the SAF is to enhance Singapore's peace and security through deterrence and diplomacy, and should these fail, to secure a swift and decisive victory over the aggressor.

Being clear about the mission of the SAF goes a good way in helping us understand what it means to be in the profession of arms. But can we dig deeper?

What are the other established sources of guidance for the profession to define itself? Do not be surprised that there should not be

one single document that prescribes everything there is to know about the SAF military profession. Perhaps it is deliberate and necessary – The profession itself is continually clarifying its identity and purpose. But it is the responsibility of every member of the SAF to seek out, discourse, and sharpen his personal understanding and convictions as a military professional.

Nevertheless, there are some official sources to guide us in our quest. We offer excerpts from a few key documents from the SAF's history, for your thoughtful consideration.

- a. *The Code of Conduct for the Singapore Armed Forces, May 1967*
- b. *The Singapore Army Bill, Dec 1965*
- c. *A speech by the late Dr Goh Keng Swee at Armed Forces' Day Parade, July 1971*
- d. *The SAF Declaration, June 1984*
- e. *The Oath of Allegiance*
- f. *The SAF Pledge*

Note: You can access all these documents in the Worksheet.



Top: Being an SAF Officer and a Singapore Citizen – How are these identities connected?

HOW DO YOU REACT TO OPERATIONS?

How may one discern whether he has a calling to be a military professional?

Is there an acid test for whether or not one embraces the military profession?

LG Lim Chuan Poh commented that it makes a difference whether one feels that he has to participate in operations, versus feeling that he gets to participate in operations.

Consider his comments below:

Everything happened very fast, and there's almost an inner calm that finally you get to do your mission, what you've been trained for, what you prepared for, what the public has invested in you for. There was almost a sense of relief that this is real...This is now

when the SAF justifies its existence. We were totally aligned. There was absolutely no sort of trying to avoid the mission.

And I think for all the key leadership in the SAF this is a very important searching question: Do you live for this? You don't welcome this, but do you live for this? Are you motivated by being able to respond in the most professional way for the country as and when the need arises? Because this is what keeps you going and this is when you need to be fully committed to this. If there is any moment when you have to set aside all the other requirements and throw yourself into the situation, this is the sort of national crisis that you must be able to do. So if it's not intrinsic, not fundamental, not core to you, you will find difficulty.

It certainly wasn't something that I opposed. Instead it was something that I in many sense welcomed. There was an air of schizophrenia between the professional in me and the so-called citizen in me. The professional in me responded to situations in crises with an attitude of 'this is when we are called into action', I welcomed it. As a simple citizen, you'd rather not have any of this turbulence and uncertainty.

But these two positions were not really conflicting as we did not invent it. It was brought upon us. Because of this deep thinking, the engagement in this process, when we are called upon to respond, you really flow into it, you almost welcome it, instead of giving excuses as to why we should not do this or that. So this is something that you all have to ask yourselves quite fundamentally: What are your values? Are your values convergent with that of the organisation? Are you aligned with the organisation? What is your own sense of mission for the organisation, instead of what the organisation is saying about itself because if there is significant divergence you are going to have huge problems.

CHAMPIONING THE PROFESSION - THE ESSENCE OF MILITARY LEADERSHIP

In the light of all that we've seen about being in the military profession, it is obvious that a civilian would naturally not want to be one – it is onerous and it is risky. Formally speaking, the SAF has seven Core Values, which we trust you already know by heart. However, you may have also observed that there are

at least three additional fundamental values for the military professional. They tend to be subsumed under the Core Values of "Loyalty to Country", "Leadership" and "Ethics", but they bear emphasis on their own. They are **Integrity, Selflessness and Sacrifice**. As a consequence, it should not be a surprise when NSFs, NSmen, and possibly even our Regulars get tempted to shirk away from the responsibilities of being a military professional, and instead act as unprofessional, even "civilianised" soldiers. Such people end up behaving like the very civilians who had trusted them in the first place to do their professional job.

This is why there is a need for leadership in the SAF military profession.

It is appropriate now to offer a definition of what it means to be a leader in the SAF:

Who you are -

A military professional – More than that, you have followers, even from within the profession. That means you are now an exemplar of the military profession – in the eyes of your followers, the SAF organisation, and society.

What you do -

You influence others to accomplish the mission, inspiring their commitment, and improving the organisation.⁴

Where your leadership concerns military professionals, you influence them to perform what is required of an SAF military professional.

4. This definition is based on the formal SAF definition of leadership, as promulgated by the SAF Centre for Leadership Development.

Leadership is being able to influence and motivate one's followers, to imbue them with trust and confidence in us so that they will carry out a mission confidently and to their best ability. Leaders achieve this by demonstrating a sure grasp of knowledge, as well as abilities such as being able to communicate with their followers. Good leaders lead by example, personal presence and involvement. The defence of the nation can only be assured by commanders who are competent to lead. The SAF therefore demands the highest standards of leadership at all levels of command and expects them to lead, excel, and inspire others to give their best to the nation.⁵

Leadership is less needed when everyone knows what to do, and is willing and able to do it. When things are predictable, when people are naturally inclined to do the work, the leadership required is not high.

It is in times of uncertainty, when people are unsure about what to do; or in times of risk, or exhaustion, when people have inertia or

are simply unmotivated to do what needs to be done: Such occasions are when good leadership is critical. These are when you as a leader must draw upon your personal influence to get the group of people to move or to act. It takes leadership to make a decision in the direction of strong values, to do what is right, when others are more inclined towards the easier but wrong path.

5. "Core Values for the SAF", Annex A, paper presented to the SAF Leadership, July 1996

It may sound as if leadership is required only in times of crises, in operations, or in war. But leadership is needed just as much in peacetime during “preparation time”. It takes leadership to do the necessary but difficult and long-drawn work of building up the professional community and the Armed Forces organisation instead of allowing stagnation and erosion to set in, steer the organisation through change, and to maintain operational readiness.

Be it in peacetime or in war, there are leadership challenges.

DEFINING THE BOUNDARY OF MILITARY LEADERSHIP

Leadership is about the exercise of your personal influence.

We may define the boundary of military leadership when we look again at the seven characteristics of a profession (See the last column in Table 2.1.)

You may notice by now that with this understanding of leadership, we should rid ourselves of a common misconception that we had alluded to in Chapter 1 - That Leadership is only equal to being in Command.

To hold a command appointment is to be vested with the authority over a group of people to perform a particular role or mission. And no doubt, most of us aspire to be a commander, or else we would not have wanted to join the SAF. However, it is important to appreciate that whether or not you are a commander, a staff officer, or an instructor; or even whether you are the deputy to a commander, you are a leader and you are expected to ex-

ercise leadership at all times. We do not shed our military professional identity when we are not in command, any less than we forget that we are men and women of the uniform when we change into civilian clothing.

The main effect of exercising leadership when out of “command” is that we have to consider the additional layer of our actual commander in the command hierarchy, knowing that the ultimate responsibility rests on him. That aside, we are still accountable for our actions as leaders wherever we are. We are still responsible for the performance and welfare of those who report to us. As professionals, we still have the duty to affirm or to correct one another in our professional work. If anything, in this day and age, it is more likely that your followers will follow you more on account of your personal influence and professionalism than on account of your rank.⁶

Finally, just as we have stressed that leadership can take place outside of command, we must also point out that leadership can also take place without having followers. At its essence, leadership is about influencing others – and this can include your subordinates, other people’s subordinates, your peers, and even your superiors.

TO CONCLUDE

Let us return to what we considered at the start of this chapter. We began this chapter by observing how, after signing on for a career in the SAF, one continues on a journey of discovering what it really means to be in the SAF, to be in the military profession. We discussed at some length the definition of being a military professional, and launched from that discussion into defining leadership in the SAF as the

6. This assertion is attested to by the influential writer on Civil-Military Relations, Morris Janowitz, in his book *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (1960).

exercise of personal influence as a military professional. It should be obvious that we have talked about leadership in the SAF in a way that extends far beyond seeing it as just being a career!

The leadership bottom-line in the military profession has often been expressed thus:

Will your men follow you into battle?

Or will you be the first one that they shoot?

(Which is to say that you've added negative leadership value – your men are better off without you!)

Whether or not this discussion has helped you to become a better leader, we cannot know for sure. It is likely that you will experience tension if your reasons for being in the SAF have been challenged. The career-profession dilemma will tend to crop up. You may also have found yourself saying, “Yes, yes, I know this, but...”, and the issue of Work-Life Balance may come readily to mind.

That is not cause for immediate alarm. Instead, let it spur you to search deeper within yourself to clarify and decide what is really central to your identity. It may help to talk to others whom you look up to as exemplar leaders of the military profession – let them serve as your guide. We've also recognised the importance of addressing Work-Life Balance, and we would direct you to Annex A if you're interested.

If, after reading this chapter, you find yourself still excited (even if daunted) by the prospect of being a leader and a military professional, and desire to learn more, then the next question that arises would be:

If leadership is all about exercising personal influence, how do I go about building my personal influence?

We, together with the interviewees, believe that the core of personal influence is Character. It is about exercising authentic leadership based on Values.

That is the subject of the next chapter.

Firstly, may I congratulate all of you on parade today on the successful completion of your training course. After you have received your commissions, you will be posted to units as platoon commanders.

Some of you may be considering making a profession of the army. Since the new terms and conditions of service have been spelt out, and since the award of various scholarships to universities in Singapore as well as abroad have been made, there has been enhanced interest among National Servicemen in joining the regular Army. While all this is encouraging, it would not be out of place to give some advice to those who are contemplating a career as a professional Army Officer.

It goes without saying that to the keen young men with good Senior Cambridge or HSC qualifications a career in the Army is, in terms of material reward, as good as most professions open to them. At the same time, it is also more demanding than most of them. This is because we shall insist on higher standards of performance with each passing year. The Army is not the place for those who want a cushy job and an easy life.

If you are thinking of making the Army your career, you should ask yourself whether you enjoy soldiering and whether you like a strenuous outdoor life. If the answer is no, then I suggest that you give no further thought to joining the regular Army as a combat officer. You should not be tempted by the good conditions of service and prospects of education and training courses overseas.



If you like soldiering, this means that as a Platoon Commander, you will take a personal interest in each and every man under your command. You will ensure that they are well looked after and you will help them over the numerous little problems which a team of National Servicemen encounters doing a strange job in an unaccustomed environment away from his family. You will take care of their training program to make sure that they become good soldiers. In short, in addition to being their commander, you will also be their guide, friend and philosopher. You will then earn their respect and loyalty.

If you are this kind of officer, then you will find a lifetime career in the regular army a satisfying, honourable and rewarding one. Regardless of whether or not you join up as a regular, I wish you all every success in your work during the remaining period of your National Service.

Speech by the Minister of Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee, at the Passing-Out Parade of Officer Cadets at the Singapore Armed Forces Institute on 18 July 1971.

This thing about commitment, values. To me, it is quite important, because when you have that, then everything else will fall in place. Whereas, if you have a person, who is able, talented, but doesn't have the right attitude, he is not going to contribute much. So the attitude part is very important.

RADM Ronnie Tay

I must emphasise that it is important to be anchored by values. If you are not anchored by the correct value system, you can be the best and all, but it would be shallow, empty, and not well respected. The value system I am talking about is the SAF 7 Core Values. I strongly believe in the SAF 7 Core Values because this is really what it means to be a good leader.

BG Winston Toh

Chapter 3

The Worth of a Leader

WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?

When BG Ravinder Singh was interviewed for this project, he recounted an experience from his career which he dubbed the “Six seconds story”. When he was a Brigade Commander, one of his Commanding Officers reported a problem to him – two of his Platoon Commanders had taken the Standard Obstacle Course test and failed by six seconds. They then tried to persuade the Supervising Officer to sign them off as having passed since they believed that they would surely pass if they took the test again. When BG Ravinder heard of it, he promptly told his Commanding Officer that this was totally unacceptable, and he ordered the two Platoon Commanders to be relieved of command.

He explained:

Six seconds may appear to be a very short time. Six seconds is the time it takes a fuse to burn, six seconds of fire can kill a soldier, six seconds can make the difference between life and death. If you compromise on six seconds and don't have the discipline to force yourself to re-do the test, then I am afraid as a leader you can't differentiate between right and wrong. How can I trust you in the heat of battle?

The officers could have easily taken the test the next day and passed. I shared this story when I was a Brigade and Division commander. To me this “Six seconds story” differentiates an officer and a leader from one who is not fit to be an officer and someone who should not lead our soldiers into battle.

This is how and where BG Ravinder Singh chose to take a stand. There were other beliefs that he particularly adhered to when he was a Unit Commander – values like Discipline, Fitness and Professionalism. However, this repu-

tation for “no compromise” in Ethics probably followed him wherever he went in MINDEF/SAF. This was how he built up his personal influence as a leader.

How about yourself?

What will you be known for? What will you stand for? What will you base your decisions on?

These questions echo those that we had set forth in the beginning of this book. The popular term that captures these ideas is that of having a “leadership brand”.

But there can be no brand without substance. By substance, we mean one's character and values.

The SAF, at the end of the day, is an organisation that when called upon wants its members to sacrifice their lives for the nation. It demands absolute loyalty.

RADM Tan Kai Hoe

THE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY ETHIC

Recall our discussion on the military profession in Chapter 2. We said that a professional is guided by a moral code in the light of what he is entrusted to do. You should have realised that a military professional has been entrusted to carry out at least the following:

The defence of the nation – even to be prepared to go to the front line of battle, and sacrifice your life for it.

The responsible use of violent force.

Your subordinates – including National Servicemen.

Safeguarding the values of our nation.

Question: *If you were a member of the public, who would you trust to bear this responsibility?*

It should be clear that for the military profession to be able to bear this weight of glory (for it is an honourable duty), there is a need for sound ethics to guide the thoughts and actions of everyone in our Armed Forces. The SAF Core Values are that shared ethic.

What are values? Why do they matter?

A value system for the institute of excellence, presented to the MINDEF Leadership in 1987:

Values are types of beliefs people have about what they consider to be right or wrong, good or bad and desirable or undesirable. They are internal to the individual and develop from involvement with family, friends, school, religion or work. Examples of values are the qualities of honesty, courage, loyalty, equality, etc.

Values are important simply because they influence behaviour. A person with values develops a

value orientation. This value orientation influences his perception and channels his behaviour in directions consistent with his values. Since our officers reflect the attitudes and biases of the Singapore society it will be necessary to train into them some higher order of values than those held by the average Singaporean. This is particularly important because of the unusual nature of the military profession which requires us to kill, or be killed, during a war.

The SAF Core Values were chosen to exemplify the character of a military professional you can trust to fulfil his calling. This ideal character applies to the whole profession. It is no wonder that values are called “values” – they constitute what we hold dear and will not abandon or compromise, even to our disadvantage. They also define the worth of a person.

Furthermore, abiding by the values of the organisation allows you to exert a positive influence on others as a leader in the SAF.

Finally, we want to stress that values matter a lot in the SAF because the military business, by nature, is fraught with crises, uncertainties and challenging situations. In situations where the going gets tough, there will be no clear-cut answers as to what is to be done. You will have to dig deep within yourself to find the answers – you will have to draw from your values to decide what to do and how to act. This is when your worth will be tested.

And I think (the SAF Core Values) should be the values of people in the SAF. That’s the common ground we should have. I personally identify with those values. They are the attributes and values required for the foundation of a modern, responsible and professional military.

LG Ng Yat Chung

CAN VALUES BE STRENGTHENED?

A common topic for debate in our military profession is the age-old Nature-Nurture question – Are leaders born or made? More specific to the organisation’s interest, should we focus more effort on selecting leaders or on nurturing them? Are a person’s values already determined by the time he reaches 18 and enters NS?

What are your views?

To address this matter, let us begin by pointing out that values are not *instincts*, which are inborn tendencies or ways of behaving. However, it is possible to be so imbued with a value that you become naturally inclined to act in that way.

We hold the view, as supported by the interviewees who spoke on the matter, that one cannot change fundamental aspects of a person’s character and values.¹ Consider how values get inculcated in Basic Military Training (BMT), particularly the value of selflessness: the communal living, reward and punishment as a group, the route march (which is never an individual march except in remedial training), the celebration of group identity (the platoon) through sports. But if you asked any BMT instructor, chances are he will tell you that they can only work with what they get – some will embrace the value and adopt it, others will just comply to stay out of trouble, while others will try to resist. By the end of BMT, an NSF’s readiness to be selfless would have surfaced. Whether he resisted or embraced it will be reflected in his end of course peer appraisal.

It is unsurprising then that the interviewees did not talk about strengthening values at the individual level. However, they did repeat-

edly emphasise two crucial aspects of values, indicating that it is possible to sharpen and reinforce one’s values:

Values Clarity: How clear are you about what is important to you, and in what order? What would you stand for?

Values Alignment: How much do you identify with the values of the SAF? How much are you prepared to adapt to embrace the values of the SAF?

Consider what some of them said:

As a leader, you will face different challenges and as you go through these challenges your values will shape your decisions. Hence it’s important to be clear about your values. You don’t decide on your values based on the situations you face. They are within you and they are fairly developed by the time you join the SAF. As you go through experiences as a young officer, especially defining experiences that could have a “life and death” type of impact, these values will surface and the experiences will reinforce certain values within you.

BG Ravinder Singh

I thought it may be useful to also say at this point in time that, besides the organisational Core Values, if you were to go and take some time to reflect, you will find that for the decisions you make in your personal life, there are certain values that guide you. Hopefully, your internal core set of values is actually largely aligned with the organisation’s set of values. If it is not, then you are in the wrong organisation.

RADM Sim Gim Guan

1. Namely, BG Winston Toh and BG Ravinder Singh.

So if you ask me what is critical, it is actually not the instincts. Instincts are important, but values (are even more so). That is why I started off by saying, the journey of discovery should allow you to know who you are very well, candidly, and also to critically look at your own values against that of the organisation, to see the convergence, because if you don't have convergence with organisational values, unless you can reshape the organisation, then probably this is not the right organisation for you. It is one way or the other.

LG Lim Chuan Poh

The opposite case is someone who is neither aligned with the organisation nor clear about his values. All other things being equal, non-alignment or lack of clarity may amount to these:

This person will have a tendency to follow his natural inclinations – which typically revolves around self-interest and self-preservation.

This person will have a tendency to follow the crowd, regardless of whether the majority view is sound or not.

This person will easily buckle under the pressure of stressful circumstances and not make the right decisions.

This person's followers and peers will not know what he stands for – he is inconsistent. It will be worse if they observe and conclude that he acts only out of personal interest.

These are not trivial issues, especially in light of what we as military professionals must do.

PERSONAL VALUES ALIGNMENT CHECK

QUESTION: Which values of the SAF are you most aligned with? Which ones do you find the most difficulty with?

- Loyalty to Country
- Leadership
- Discipline
- Professionalism
- Ethics
- Fighting Spirit
- Care for Soldiers

QUESTION: Besides the SAF Core Values (or your Services' additional Core Values), what other values that you hold dear to will help you serve effectively as a leader in the SAF?



CAN YOU SEPARATE YOUR PRIVATE LIFE FROM PUBLIC SERVICE?

Box 3.1

Not long ago in the news, we read of a Colonel from a foreign Armed Force who was charged and found guilty of two counts of first degree murder, two counts of sexual assault, and 82 counts of breaking and entering. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, and his “secret life” was unravelled and revealed, much to the horror of the public. Even his colleagues were surprised.

“We don’t understand why,” said his superior, who was the Service Chief of Staff, “This individual was a man of tremendous capacities. He was professional. I still can’t reconcile the two people we’ve seen.”

Despite his reservations, when the charges were first raised, the same Chief of Staff emphasised in an official statement that *“The XX Forces hold their members to a very high standard of conduct and performance, in XX or abroad, on or off military duty. I confirm that the XX Force is fully supporting civilian authorities in the conduct of the current matter.”*

QUESTION: Can a military leader be morally bankrupt and still serve effectively?

YOU CAN’T HIDE THIS: THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

The case study presented in Box 3.1 was a true albeit extreme story. It is extreme in terms of its ramifications. It is also extreme because in most cases, the worth of your character and values is hard to conceal. It is usually apparent to those you work with. More than that, as you rise in rank and grow in your tenure in the SAF, your true worth will be known to more people. They will not just consider the vision that you espouse. They will also see whether your actions have matched your words. They will see whether your leadership brand is matched with your leadership character.

Make no mistake about it – in our professional community as in any other community, people are on the look-out for *authentic leadership*.

There are various definitions of authentic leadership, but the one that seems most relevant to us is this – An authentic leader is one who:²

- Has **high self-awareness**. He is clear about his identity, Core Values, emotions, motives and goals. He is clear about what he stands for.

2. Adapted from Walumbwa, F. O., Avolio, B. J., Gardner, W. L., Wernsing, T. S., & Peterson, S. J. (2008). “Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure.” *Journal of Management*, 34(1), 89 – 126.

- **Follows his internal compass.** He uses his internal standards and values to guide his behaviour rather than allow outside pressures to control them. Such a leader will wield substantial personal influence within the organisation. He will not be perceived to “wayang” (because he really isn’t). Rather, he will be perceived to have leadership worthiness (or legitimacy). He is sincere. He is authentic.
- **Is transparent.** He is open and honest in presenting his true self to others.
- **Is balanced.** He is open about his own perspective, but is balanced in considering others’ perspectives. *Do you aspire to be such a leader?*
- **Is highly aligned with the organisation’s values.**
- **Leads by example.**

I think (a leader) should be authentic. You cannot just put up a front, even if you are a general. You have to be authentic.

RADM Tan Kai Hoe

People will see how you behave all the time. Your behaviour, the way you interact, the way you speak, and the kind of things you do. People look at what you do, and if you are not authentic - at work you do certain things and then afterwards, you do something different - it’s an act right? I think that’s not helpful.

RADM Sim Gim Guan

Let me put it in a very succinct way, a straightforward way: Core Values are not just to be put into books, or put on the wall. Core Values are something to be lived up to day in, day out, something to be breathed. If the Core Values of a commander, a senior officer, the leader, are not there, I bet you, the people would know. So as a leader you can say anything you want, but if you don’t reflect the Core Values in the way that you do things, people will know.

BG Ong Boon Hwee

BUILDING YOUR WORTH

Taken altogether, here's a brief overview of how you can build up your leadership worth over the span of your career.

First, do a personal values alignment check (See page 51 of this chapter). You must conduct an honest self-appraisal about whether you align or identify yourself with the values of the organisation.

Second, while you are still junior in the profession, you are in the position to be influenced rather than to influence. Therefore, choose wisely who and what you allow to influence you. Read widely. Identify mentors. Talk to people, but be circumspect about it.

Third, constantly reflect to clarify your values – i.e. what do you stand for?

Fourth, know that every leadership situation is an opportunity for you to exercise and sharpen your values. You will be defining yourself along the way, first to yourself and then to others. This is how you build a reputation for being authentic and values-based, or otherwise.³

When people see you in action, and feel that they can trust you and know what you stand for, they will be more prepared to follow you.

RESTING POINT

Congratulations on having come this far in the book! You would have realised that Chapters 2 and 3 go together in providing a macro perspective of leadership. They address the fundamentals of being an effective leader – the significance of being in the military profession and the question of values. As much of it was emphasised by many of the interviewees, we felt it was essential to build this foundation first before we move into the next segment of the book. In Chapters 4 to 7, we will discuss more micro-level, tactical aspects of leadership – practical considerations and heuristics for being an effective leader on the ground – when you have to exercise leadership at the direct indirect level, or as a staff officer.

Press on and keep learning!

3. You can also learn from the leadership situation that others face – especially if they are your superiors. Observe how they decide and act, and then ask yourself what would you have done if you were in their shoes? This habit will afford you many opportunities to learn from the experiences of others; it can even help to prepare you for future appointments. However, it will not allow you to build a leadership reputation.

My own philosophy, and this was something that we shared when we started the leadership centre, and I have articulated this from the very first day I was platoon commander and I fundamentally believe in this, it is that you have to set a personal example. And the reason why I use the term 'leadership by example' is not because it is a slogan; it is because exemplary leadership is the best source of influence. So if you look at the essence of leadership as personal influence, what is the best way to really multiply your personal influence? It is when people look at you and say, "He stood for this. This is what he is, he has all these qualities." So they feel motivated, inspired, sometimes even obliged to follow the example. So the philosophy is leadership by example, but the underlying thing, the essence of it is this ability to exercise personal influence.

LG Lim Chuan Poh

Chapter 4

Stepping up into Leadership

THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW

It is Saturday evening at Officer Cadet School (OCS). You have received your commissioning sword and your parents have donned your officer rank upon your shoulder. Standing around you are your jubilant mates who have completed the gruelling cadet course with you.

Taken together, that Saturday would count as one of the greatest days of your life!

The day after tomorrow is Monday. This day marks the beginning of your first appointment as an officer. For some, Monday is about coming back to SAFTI Military Institute (MI) to return stores. Even in that mundane task, how is walking about in SAFTI MI both the same as before and yet different? What is the same? What is different? For some, Monday means reporting to another camp, another unit, another world. After the euphoria of being commissioned and congratulated, Monday brings one right back down to earth, back to the lowest rung of the officer hierarchy. What is the same? What is different?

With the benefit of hindsight, if you could relive that Monday, and relive the experience of undertaking your first appointment, what would you have done differently?

BACK TO BASICS

Roughly put, Chapters 1 to 3 addressed the same issues that you would have been introduced to during officer cadet training. For example, as a cadet, you would have learned the fundamentals of leadership in the SAF – your identity as an officer and the Core Values associated with that identity (covered in Chapters 2 and 3). You would also have learned about learning, and acquired the basic skills for your own leadership development (the scope of Chapter 1). Cadet training was also designed

to raise your level of military competence, so that you could stand before your men with a fair level of confidence. In short, cadet training was designed to transform you from a soldier into a leader. Those were the basics.

Despite the officer cadet training, however, your effectiveness as a leader on the ground is not assured. Nothing beats having the opportunity to exercise your own leadership through personal experience. However, it surely helps to go into it well prepared – with your beliefs, attitudes, priorities and strategies in the right place. The better your starting point, the easier it will be to refine your leadership so that you can grow to assume more senior levels of leadership within the organisation.

BEFORE YOU HIT THE GROUND: PREPARING FOR LEADERSHIP

This phase begins before you have stepped into your leadership appointment. It may very well overlap with your initial weeks of being in the appointment. If you recall the SAF 24/7 leadership framework, the circle represents the context within which you must exercise your leadership. Use your preparation time to understand what will be your context – this is akin to the **Appreciation of Situation** phase of Battle Procedure.



You may have a unique formula for determining what elements of the context are essential. In the interest of time and space, we will mention a few elements in summary:

1. First things first, understand what and who you are responsible for.
2. Invest time to appreciate the mission and purpose of your unit (and parent unit).
3. Know the people you will be working with.

THE SAF 24/7 LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Fig 4.1

The SAF 24/7 Leadership Framework is a framework for thinking and talking about leadership.

-  The triangle specifies the building blocks of what is needed **WITHIN YOU** for effective leadership.
-  The circle emphasises **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW AND ATTEND TO AROUND YOU** – it is the context within which you must exercise your leadership. Before you assume a leadership appointment, we recommend that you devote time to understand and appreciate your upcoming context.



4. Build bridges with other branches within the unit.
5. Draw from your own experiences.
6. Listen and learn from others (this includes reading widely).
7. Dedicate time for personal reflection.

The benefits of your preparation time will be well worth it. This is all the more so when you are assuming a command appointment, as you will find yourself being called upon to make decisions very soon. The day you step into the unit will also be the day you are observed and assessed – everyone will be forming an impression of you, and it will put you in good stead if you are confident, of sound character and, at the same time, be someone that others can relate to easily.

The paradox of starting off well, as attested to by many of the interviewees, is that one should not think that he knows everything, nor to act as if he does. From a learning perspective, it is a key survival skill that one should be humble – ready to listen and to learn from others, even from those with whom you habitually do not associate (the human tendency is to spend more time with people who are similar to you; but leaders are expected to work beyond their personal comfort zone). The more you are ready to listen and to learn, the more you will understand and the more others will feel open to talk to you because they feel valued. Your opportunity to build confidence will come when you have to influence and make decisions, which in turn depends on how much you know and appreciate about the context (especially about the people involved).

From the learning perspective, humility counts. If you are open to learning, you basically accept that you don't know everything and that translates to how you interact with people.

RADM Tay Kian Seng

You must be prepared to learn and you must be prepared to work with anyone no matter what rank or how old they are. So first of all you must be humble; you want to learn even when you are the Chief, because you don't know everything. So take your time, and learn to listen.

RADM Kwek Siew Jin

NOW THAT YOU HAVE APPRECIATED THE CONTEXT

What's next? If you recall, to lead others is to influence them to accomplish something. The ways and means of influencing others can be split into two categories: Either you exert an influence *directly upon* people, or you exert an influence *indirectly through* people (usually, through other leaders subordinate to you). Through the course of Chapters 5 and 6, we will describe the key elements of direct and indirect leadership, provide some stories of how the interviewees demonstrated or emphasised aspects of either way, and discuss how these ways are interdependent.

But for starters, let us illustrate further how direct and indirect leadership differ.

THE WAYS OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT LEADERSHIP

Suppose you were the Commanding Officer of a battalion, in your chain of command you will have subordinate leaders reporting to you. These leaders in turn will have more junior leaders reporting to them, and finally, at the base (or forefront) of the command chain are the enlistees – your men. This relationship is depicted in simplified form below in Figure 4.2.

A SIMPLIFIED CHAIN OF COMMAND

Fig 4.2

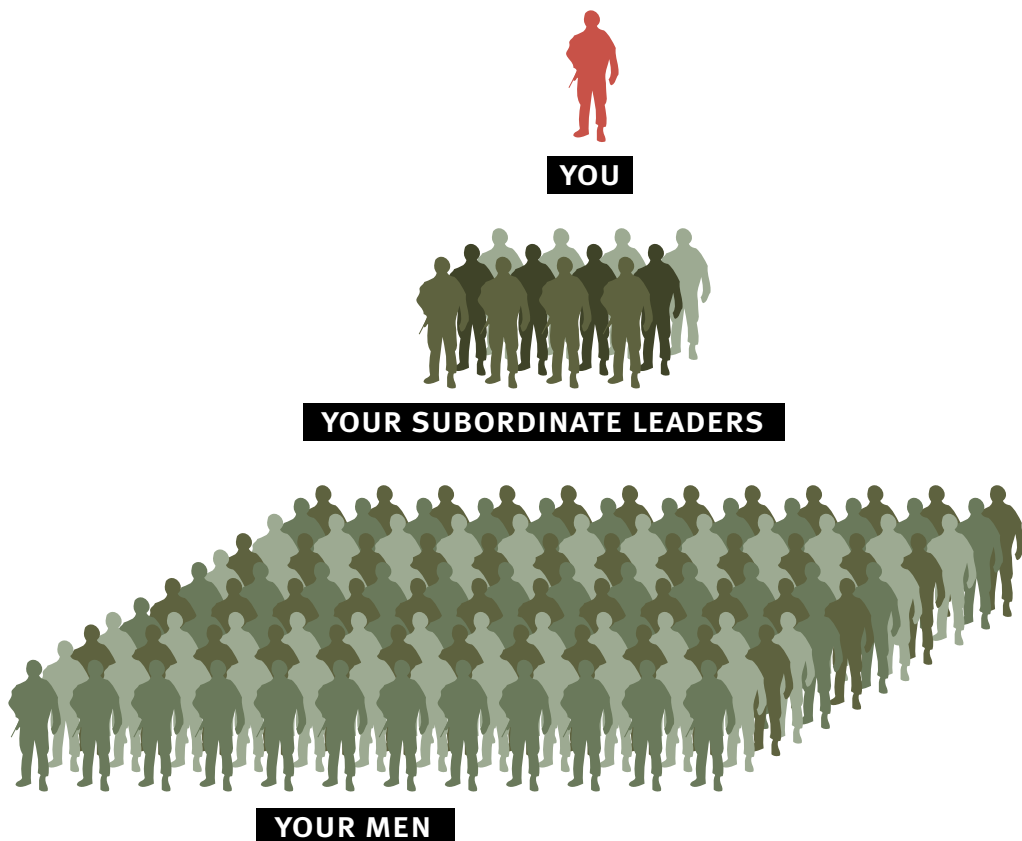
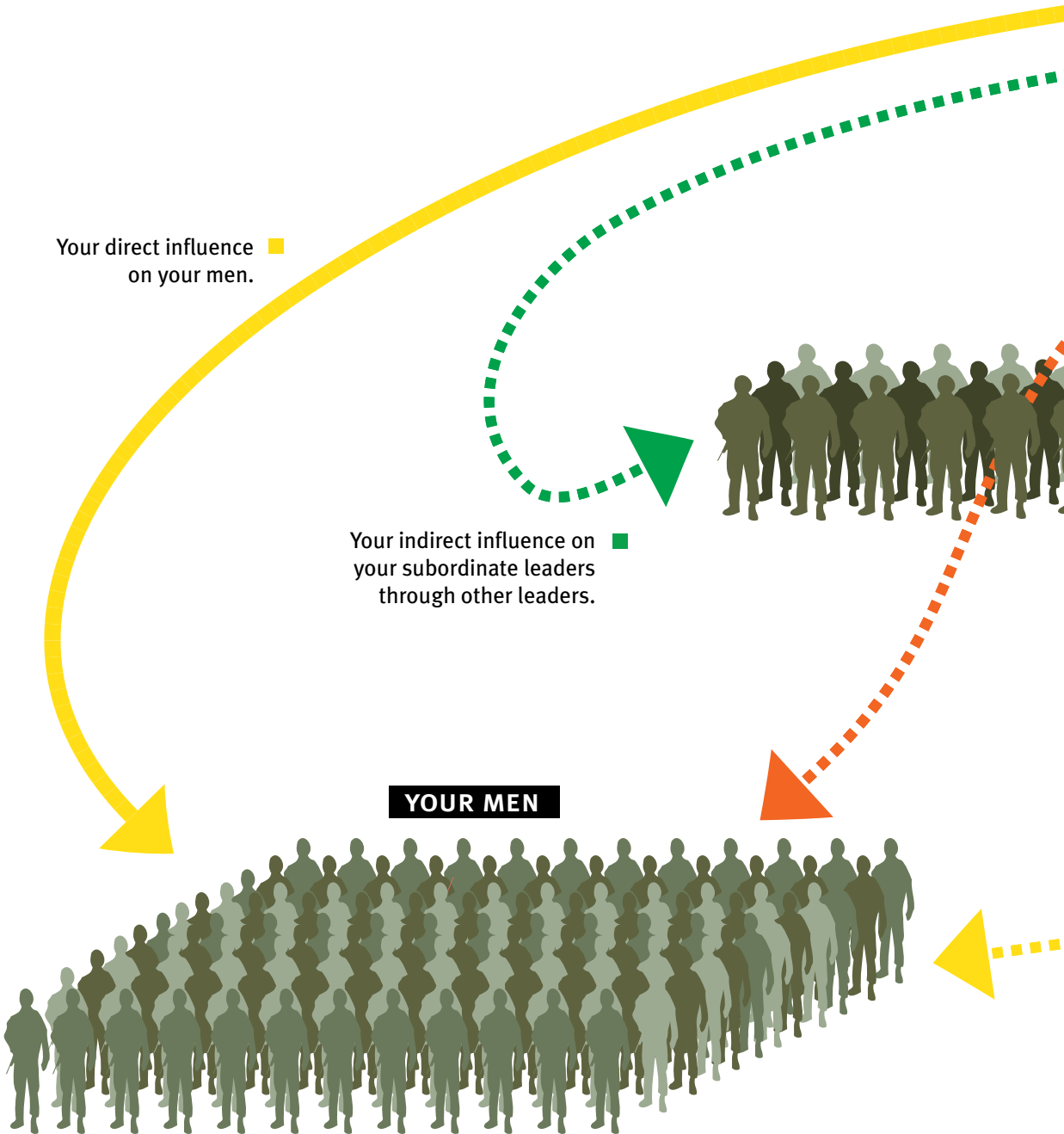
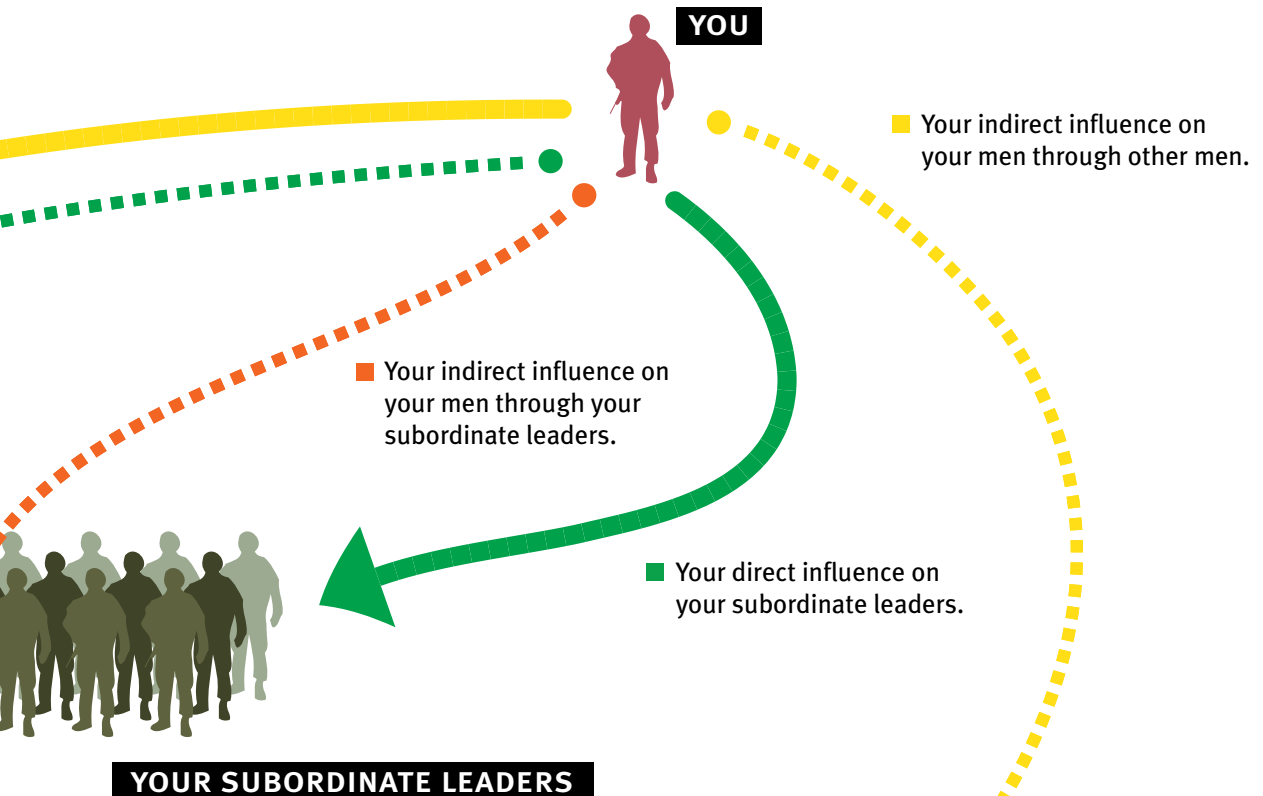


Fig 4.3

YOUR LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE DOWN THE COMMAND CHAIN

How do you influence your subordinate leaders and your men? Figure 4.3 shows the direct and indirect leadership influences that you may exercise on your followers.





These two ways of influence are not mutually exclusive – they interact with each other, as for instance a leader's direct influence can be intended to deliver an indirect influence. Each of them involves a variety of leadership styles. It is important for you as a junior officer to attend to both direct and indirect leadership, and to build up your expertise in an array of styles pertaining to each way. We emphasise that you will have to demonstrate both ways of leadership in whichever appointment you will find yourself in. Beyond that, throughout your career, you will also find different situations

calling for a unique way and style of influence, and therefore your flexibility and ability to adapt to the situation will be essential.

We hope that the ensuing discussions on direct and indirect ways of leadership influence will help you frame your approach to leadership situations in the future. You may also come to perceive how you need to blend both direct and indirect ways of leadership to truly be effective. Before we proceed further, let us introduce two key ideas about influence for you to keep at the back of your head.

IDEA #1 – IT’S ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

Remember that the basis for influence is interpersonal relationships. Even if you are higher in rank than your followers, you have to come to their level and be able to relate to them.

Different interviewees had different ways of making themselves more relational to their followers. RADM Kwek Siew Jin spoke of going to his staffers’ office or cubicle to discuss work issues, as opposed to summon-

ing them up to his own office. BG Winston Toh shared about bringing his staff out for regular lunches where they would refrain from talking about work issues, but rather share more broadly about their lives.

This personal relationship brings to life the value of “Care for Soldiers”. As a leadership tool, it smoothens the way for you to exercise your leadership influence without having to resort to coercion.

IDEA #2 – INFLUENCE WORKS BOTH WAYS

As a leader, you have to be able to maintain a constant pulse on the ground. Engaging with people allows you to understand the ground concerns – which in turn should improve your leadership approach as well as your decision-making. You also need to ensure that your decisions and orders are being properly executed – oftentimes the only way to do that is to go forward and see it with your own eyes. Finally, you may also need to know how your style and approach as a leader is influencing the ground. Feedback for a leader is not easy to come by, and you will do well to seize all opportunities to learn in order to grow and become more effective.

LG Lim Chuan Poh and RADM Tay Kian Seng both spoke of the importance of having good role models, especially as a junior officer. Beyond that, allowing yourself to be influenced means that you are constantly looking out for how others can give you useful knowledge or advice, even if they are junior to you.

Armed with these considerations, let’s go on to consider the intricacies of direct and indirect leadership.

PEOPLE AND RESPECT

So actually, fundamentally, my own outlook is that you really need to treat the people working around you as people.

RADM Tay Kian Seng

I think that a few things we must remember when we interact with people – that everybody is a person worthy of respect. If you don’t give them respect, they would not give you the respect in return.

RADM Kwek Siew Jin

I think to gain respect, you need to give respect. It’s not about the epaulette on the shoulder. Of course people will give you that respect because of your position, because of your rank, but... they must respect you for what you stand for, what you believe in... what you exemplify in terms of Core Values.

RADM Sim Gim Guan

Up to the time I was a Battalion Commander, it was really what is called direct leadership. Your commanders and men see you all the time. They see you in training, they see you running and they see you doing the SOC. My battalion saw me training for the SOC even before they started training for the SOC. They could see me making an effort to pass the SOC. This is direct leadership. They see me doing it and know that they would also have to do it, no excuses. If I could do it, then they too will have to do it. After I passed my SOC test, I said to the battalion, "Let's all go and do the SOC". The whole battalion did it. In direct leadership, you demonstrate, people copy and emulate you. So direct leadership is a very physical visual leadership. You must be prepared to be in front to do it first before you ask your commanders and soldiers to do it.

BG Ravinder Singh

Chapter 5

Follow me – The Influence of Direct Leadership

Story 1 - When LG Lim Chuan Poh was a Platoon Commander during an overseas jungle training stint, he had to lead an infantry platoon attack on an enemy deployed on a hill. Knowing that a straightforward charge up the hill would have been difficult to succeed, he decided to get his platoon to worm-crawl all the way up the hill from a flank (to avoid detection) and charge down upon the enemy's rear. The worm-crawl was tedious and painful, but then - Lieutenant Lim's platoon did it because their commander was personally leading the worm-crawl. As a result, they achieved complete surprise on the enemy (and their instructors) and won praise as a disciplined and well-trained platoon.

Story 2 - It was a large-scale manoeuvre exercise involving mechanised forces and even the swimming of armoured vehicles. During the preparatory phase of the training, an armoured vehicle sank. Though no one was endangered or injured, the incident threatened to deal a blow to the confidence and morale of the commanders and soldiers on exercise. BG Ong Boon Hwee, who was Chief Armour Officer, rushed on site to personally oversee the investigation into the causes, believing that his presence was needed to assure his soldiers and to put the situation right quickly so that the exercise could proceed safely and professionally. Together with the commanders on the ground, he went on to rigorously uncover the cause for the incident, and to decide on the way to proceed with the manoeuvre. He personally "rode out" with the crew on the affected vehicle to bolster their confidence, and to experience first-hand that the solutions worked. Not only did the manoeuvre exercise proceed successfully as planned, the shared experience forged through this incident went a long way in strengthening the morale of the force.

These two stories are examples of Direct Leadership, whereby you exert leadership influence on your followers by your personal physical presence and charisma, your words and your actions. Such influence is either through a direct one-to-one or a one-to-many relationship, and its impact is contingent on the strength of your personality and character. Your men are motivated out of their trust and respect in you, and in their confidence in your personal leadership ability.

Direct leadership is often used to describe the nature of ground level junior commandship in times of war - How will you motivate your men to charge in a fire fight? How will you motivate them to push themselves beyond their limits in order to accomplish a mission, or to act for the common good even to the point of personal sacrifice? In peacetime, how will your men be willing to perform onerous and time-consuming tasks without grumbling? How will they become a disciplined and fighting fit force?

Direct leadership is often associated with being a leader in a small to mid-sized unit (battalion, squadron or ship), where it is possible to know everyone by face and by name (and therefore be able to exert a direct influence on each of them). As you progress up the military leadership hierarchy, you will find that you will still have to exercise direct leadership, particularly on your subordinates. How much effort then will you expend to sharpen your abilities in this aspect of leadership?

The ensuing sections present some key elements of direct leadership.

Even when you are a strategic leader, you will still need to go down and continue to engage the people and win their trust. Strategic leaders will still have direct reports. They still have a direct leadership role to their subordinates. When I was a Division Commander, I had my Brigade Commanders as direct reports. Even a strategic leader like the COA has a direct leadership role to his Division Commanders.

I strongly believe in training 2 levels down. So if you are a CO, two levels down means training the OC and the PC. However you only mentor 1 level down. If you mentor too many levels down, you are doing the OC's job. Why do you train 2 levels down? It is for your own assurance. If your next level of command fails to train well, you can at least guarantee that you have provided enough training and oversight.

BG Winston Toh

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF DIRECT LEADERSHIP

Leadership by Example

This refers to the attitude of asking your people to do only what you are prepared to do yourself (and even more). It is the habit of going through things together with your people – especially the tedious, challenging and “weekend-burning” ones. The operational wartime equivalent of personal example is being the first to lead the charge of your men into the thick of battle. It is critical for motivating your followers to act sacrificially, and therefore it is fundamental to any aspect of military leadership.

In peacetime, demonstrating leadership by example is critical to building and sustaining your “legitimacy” as a leader. It takes consistent effort and a string of positive examples to build up your legitimacy as a leader, but it can take just one failure to act as you should to substantially tarnish your reputation.

Leadership by example does not mean, however, that you should do the work that your subordinates should be doing (this just encourages loafing). However, you must be able to convince your followers that you can and will endure the same burdens and hardships as them if necessary. Notice that we do not say that you should be as technically proficient or competent as your followers in everything. That is neither possible nor expected. Our belief is that you should set an example of character and values – you will surely find many occasions to practice this in the daily course of your work.

EXAMPLES OF LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE

Being the first to clear the Standard Obstacle Course, and excelling in IPPT.

Ensuring that all your men have returned from an exercise in a good state, and have completed all the work before you leave for your own rest.

Pushing yourself the hardest when your men are likewise working hard.

Demonstrating personal work-life balance.

***Right:** Direct Leadership –
Asking your people to do only
what you are prepared do
yourself (and even more)*



Quotations on Leadership by Example

Maybe the fundamental belief when I started was that at the end of the day, as Generals you must be prepared to lead by example, walk the talk.

RADM Tay Kian Seng

I believe in the philosophy of leadership by example and therefore as a leader, you must demonstrate the right behaviours, you must step forth and demonstrate before you can ask others to follow you.

BG Ravinder Singh

It is important for (people you lead) to know that the SAF leadership cares for them. How do you think that concern for them can be best communicated? You need to develop your own view on how that is best done, starting with the SAF Core Values. For me action speaks louder than words. Leadership by example and care for soldiers trump everything else.

LG Ng Yat Chung

The Art of Leadership Presence

Leadership presence stems from the concept of command presence, and it simply means being present in the eyes of your followers, in such a way that you inspire their respect for your leadership, and motivate them to accomplish their work. Leadership by example will motivate you to be present with your men in the first place, but presence is what will stir up your men's mind, body and spirit. The great military leaders are those who wield tremendous leadership presence.

Presence can be manifested in various ways: As a leader, every word that you say will call forth a response from your men, and it's not just what you say, but also how you say it that will matter. A joke may lighten the atmosphere of the whole room, but a sharp word of criticism could silence everyone. Your personal image - sharpness of posture, uniform and head-dress, your height and weight, and even the car you drive - can shape others' feelings of respect for you. Personality counts too - Extroverted people tend to pass on their

energy to others, while those who are soft-spoken by nature can make their presence known simply by being great listeners. Regardless of personality, you will do well to be mindful of what effect your presence has on those around you.

Leadership presence is also essential for a leader to be effective in other ways. It involves knowing where you ought to be so that you can gain situational awareness, make timely decisions or adjustments, motivate your men, or to celebrate successes. By being present, you can gain first-hand information as opposed to relying on second-hand information. The operational equivalent would be that of knowing where to be in order to wield the most effective Command and Control at the time when it matters.

The artful practice of presence is an everyday affair. You can't be everywhere all the time - you should be deliberate about precisely where you ought to be each hour of the day to gain the most leverage and exercise the most influence.

So being there, being present, not just during formal hours, but after hours, is an important function. The instinct shouldn't be to work 8 to 5, and then everyone goes and does his own thing. You would not build up a cohesive unit that way. As regulars, when you are in an active unit, you are really preparing a unit that an NS Commander is going to take over: likely one of your officers is going to take over as the OC, BC of the unit. So you are actually grooming and preparing for a purpose. Of course when an emergency occurs, you will take that unit out and lead it into operations. But if not you are actually nurturing it for the future. So you must nurture the right instincts and the right habits inside.

As a commander you have to communicate. As a commander you have to show your presence. Command presence is very important. Show your presence to establish that relationship. You can't do it through other people. Everyone must build their own personal relationship with the troops. If you as a CO don't even visit your men after half a year, then who are you to the men? When other people ask "Who's your CO, what's your CO's name?", and if your men go, "Uh uh uh..." then you are not worthy to be their CO. So you must establish that relationship.

BG Winston Toh

Communicating to Influence

Communication is spending time listening to and talking to your subordinates. You will not really 'know' your people and be able to relate to them unless you have spent time interacting with them, even if it means not talking about work-related matters. You must devote time relating to them as people, not merely as subordinates!

As it concerns work, a leader's communication with his subordinates can have the following purposes:

- A. To discuss the unit's vision, goals, and plans. To share ideas to improve the unit.
- B. To explain the rationale for work tasks or decisions that were made, or to explain the higher purpose for the ground level work that your people have to do.
- C. To understand the nature of a work problem, and to find solutions to solve it.
- D. To mentor and coach your subordinate leaders.
- E. To give and to receive individual feedback. (Yes, you can learn from feedback given by your subordinates.)
- F. To celebrate success or to address "failures" or disappointments as a group.
- G. To understand what your followers are thinking and feeling, and what they need so you will know what and how to fight for.

As you spend more time listening and talking to your subordinates, you build mutual trust and respect. Your character and values may also rub off on them as they “catch” these lessons from you. Likewise, you stand to benefit greatly from gaining feedback and insight from your followers – if you would be humble enough to learn from them.

The challenge that leaders on the ground often face is making time to engage their people. What percentage of your time would you spend getting to know your superior? How about your peers? And finally, how about your subordinates? The perspective of the interviewees weighed strongly on the side of spending the majority of your time getting to

Where time is available, where it is possible for you to do so, explain, talk to your people, communicate with your people. It is useful because it allows you to allow them to understand you, understand how you think, understand how you see issues, and through that process there will be that mutual respect that comes about.

RADM Sim Gim Guan

I think the most important thing with people is to listen. Don't talk so fast that you can't hear, or don't talk so much that you can't hear. You must listen. Somebody once said you have two ears and one mouth, so listen twice as much as you speak.

When you listen you know what other people want, what other people like or what their aspirations are. How do you get to know the people that you are working with so that you'll know how to work with them? Even a Chief must know how to work with his staff to get the best out of them. Each person has a different character so if you know how to work with the person in a way, in a particular way, you will get more out of him or her than if you just did it the same way. So it's all down to this: take time, listen, know your people, and earn their respect.

RADM Kwek Siew Jin

know your subordinates. We believe that this is such a critical aspect of work that it can well over-ride the time one spends in front of the computer checking emails!

MANAGEMENT AND DIRECT LEADERSHIP

As a direct leader, you will find yourself having to make tens and possibly hundreds of management decisions each day for your subordinates. These include manpower decisions, work tasking decisions, training decisions, logistics decisions, and welfare decisions. The list can go on. It is possible that deliberating, making and communicating these decisions will take up the bulk of your time in the office, and these decisions will have a direct and possibly immediate impact on your subordinates.

Beyond decision-making, there are other kinds of management-related activities that you, as a military leader, are almost certain to have to perform as part and parcel of your work. We offer a few below:

- Planning and budgeting
- Allocating forces and resources
- Force equipping and preparation
- Controlling, monitoring and coordinating activities
- Supervising
- Problem-solving
- Providing services or producing goods

A moment's thought would reveal that a lot of these activities concern the organising of resources towards achieving organisational goals.

Can you imagine how direct leadership can come into play in handling these management issues? In other words, how can the way you make management decisions and communicate them deliver a positive leadership influence on your subordinates?

As an example, BG Hugh Lim shared about how he (as a Company Commander) went out of his way to press for a higher ammunition scale for his company's demolition live firing – this was so that his men would have enough ammunition for a realistic training exercise. The most immediate impact of BG Lim's action would be the direct influence on his conducting officer who may perceive that his commander is serious about proper training for their men. Another level of impact would be on the men who would have had an enhanced training experience (this borders on being an "indirect influence").

The challenge then is not to go about making management decisions wearing merely a "managerial hat", but to put the "managerial hat" on a leadership "head".

THINKING FURTHER ABOUT LEADERSHIP VIS-À-VIS MANAGEMENT

Box 5.1

Many books have been written about the distinctions between leadership and management. One such conceptual differentiation is provided by Warren Bennis in his book (*On Becoming a Leader*):

- The manager administers; the leader innovates.
- The manager is a copy; the leader is an original.
- The manager maintains; the leader develops.
- The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people.
- The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust.
- The manager accepts reality; the leader investigates it.
- The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why.
- The manager imitates; the leader originates.
- The manager accepts the *status quo*; the leader challenges it.
- The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his or her own person.
- The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing.

It is useful to distinguish conceptually the differences between leaders and managers, insofar as it helps us in our understanding of what we need to do well as leaders.

In practice, the two go hand in glove. Leaders must be good managers, while great managers are typically also great leaders.

As part of the commission to be officers, we have already been called to lead. Effective officers lead and manage well. It is a privilege when we are also called to command, for we know those moments are few and precious, and the responsibilities great. If we have been diligent in our practice in both leadership and management as officers, then, when called, the formal authority that comes with command will sit safe and well on shoulders already well-acquainted for the appointment.

Reference: Bennis, W. (2003). *On becoming a leader*. Cambridge, MA, Perseus Publishing.

If (Squadron Commanders) are not good leaders in a way that they can make you talk, share what you are thinking, share your aspirations, grow and feel you are being groomed or have grown, then we are lost.

RADM Tay Kian Seng

NURTURING AS A DIRECT LEADERSHIP FUNCTION

Perhaps one of the most lasting and powerful forms of direct leadership is when you as a leader deliberately invest in the professional development and well-being of your subordinate leaders. This is when you are nurturing them to become more competent and effective leaders in their own right, and to help them overcome challenges in their current appointments. The fruits of such labour may not be immediate, but they can have an enduring impact, especially for those leaders who will continue to progress through the ranks in the professional military community. Such lasting impact may come about when your subordinate leader looks up to you as a role model, and begins to imbibe your leadership style, your values and sense of identity.

Be mindful of who and how you are influencing your subordinate leaders!

BEYOND THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

Finally, it may be worth noting that your leadership influence can extend beyond your chain of command.¹ You will surely engage others in your unit, in adjacent units or branches, your peers from other services, and so on. Remember that insofar as you share the same identity with them as members of the military profession, you can influence, inspire, and even challenge them to act and to grow as fellows of the same cloth, sharing the same espoused values.

You will realise then that in almost any situation, you can exercise direct leadership.

1. We had raised this point in Chapter 2, but it bears repetition.

Indirect leadership is really about moving, inspiring and motivating people. This is the other aspect of leadership as opposed to direct leadership. You inspire them by giving them a vision, giving them a goal, developing a plan, motivating them, engaging them, making them believe that this is something worthwhile for them and for the organisation and that they can make a difference.

BG Ravinder Singh

Chapter 6

Indirect Leadership: Influencing Beyond Your Immediate Sphere

Story 1 – “Killing the Messenger”: Ever since he was a young officer, LG Lim Chuan Poh believed firmly in getting people to change their attitude from a fear of “killing the messenger” to, at the first opportunity, informing someone about any situation. It involved a cultural change against a prevailing belief that if you reported a matter, you would get “shot”. When he was a Brigade Operations Officer, he would instruct his staff that no matter what time it was, they were to give him a call if a situation arose. It was a long and difficult process, but positive steps were taken towards building a culture and ethic within the unit such that when an incident happened, people would react not by sweeping things under the carpet but by informing their superiors even as they were handling the situation.

Story 2 – Organizing the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meeting: In 2006, The IMF - World Bank Annual Meeting was held in Singapore. It was a large-scale event and a great opportunity for Singapore to make a difference on the international stage. BG Ravinder Singh was assigned to co-chair the organizing team, which involved staff numbering in the thousands. He deliberately chose not to be directive, and avoided telling people what they should do. Rather, he saw his role as being that of forging an environment that would allow the organizers to function effectively and to deliver the desired outcome (i.e. a well-organized international meeting). He worked to give assurance to the organizers that the SAF would collaborate hand in hand with the civilian organisations, and he brought in SAF resources to help bolster the areas that most needed help. Along the way, he brought encouragement and raised the confidence of those working with and under him that things would go well. By most accounts, the meeting was a resounding success for Singapore.

In these two stories, what was accomplished? Both LG Lim Chuan Poh and BG Ravinder Singh were able to exert a leadership influence that extended beyond the direct impact of their interactions with people. One helped to shape a culture in a unit. The other provided a scaffold that enabled others to excel in their work and achieve something beyond the ability of any one man.

This is the impact of indirect leadership.

DEFINING INDIRECT LEADERSHIP

Indirect leadership is the art and science of influencing people through people (usually, but not necessarily, your subordinate leaders). It is the technique of having leadership presence without being physically present – this means that your influence can extend beyond the sphere of those you work directly with, within or beyond your chain of command. A moment’s thought will reveal why such leadership is necessary: As you rise up the leadership hierarchy, and the number of people working under you increases, you will be less able to exert direct leadership on all your followers. Either you won’t have the time to attend to everyone, or you won’t have the skills or knowledge to be in a position to influence everyone even if you had the time.

Indirect leadership has been implicitly recognised as a fundamental and necessary means of conducting operations. In the SAF battle procedure, the commander (usually at the Battalion level and above) will exercise his command authority by means of issuing his Command Intent and a Commander’s Planning Guidance (CPG) to his staff. This is issued under the umbrella of the higher HQ’s intent. What is the idea behind this? It is to enable the commander’s staff to conduct their planning, preparation, and actual execution

of operations without having to seek constant direction from the commander. The commander is thus able to orchestrate the operation in such a way that he doesn't have to be present everywhere all the time – this is the essence of indirect leadership.¹

Should you be concerned about indirect leadership as a junior officer? Yes! You will have to exercise indirect leadership where you are because you will not be able to be everywhere. You will have to find ways to influence people indirectly, and you will do very well to start honing indirect leadership skills early in your career.

Indirect leadership is a challenging skill to learn. It is harder to do compared to direct leadership, and it is also less likely to yield

immediate results. However, the impact is usually more extensive and enduring. A leader who can skilfully apply both direct and indirect influence can achieve a “force multiplier” effect – where your team dramatically increases in effectiveness compared to you trying to direct their individual efforts. RADM Kwek Siew Jin likened effective leadership to being able to draw out the best from your followers. RADM Tan Kai Hoe described leadership that “outlasts your own self” as being a “clock maker” versus being a “time teller”. Oftentimes, you will find that exercising indirect influence is needed (working in tandem with your direct influence) to achieve just that. So read on!

As we proceed to discuss Indirect Leadership, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What are the key factors for effective indirect leadership?
2. What are the main obstacles to enduring leadership influence?
3. How do direct and indirect leadership build on each other?
4. Who can I currently influence through indirect leadership, and how?

Q

1. One must not forget too that in operations, there is always the possibility of the commander being KIA, WIA or MIA. A good commander will enable his team to function well even without him present.

INDIRECT LEADERSHIP WITHIN AND ACROSS TEAMS

If you are a talented and driven leader, you might be tempted to think that you can influence your unit effectively by yourself. If you are an introverted leader, you might feel that it is easier and more effective to be holed up in your office and work alone. However, if you want to be really effective as a leader, and attain that leadership force multiplier effect, dismiss those thoughts. You must cultivate the mind-set of achieving success as a team, or as a team of teams, and not as an individual.

To be able to select your own team is a rare opportunity in the SAF. If you have been granted this privilege, then pay attention to selecting the right combination of people for the job. Most of the time however, you will be a “price-taker”, when a team is already configured for you. Either way, the imperative is to know your team so well that you can employ them synergistically and are able to resolve conflicts as and when they arise.

After you have your team, building them up takes much effort. This is where indirect leadership is just as important as direct leadership. It involves strengthening the relationships between team members, clarifying each one’s roles and responsibilities, and establishing team rules (or SOPs).² Remember that the key is to build a system that can thrive and succeed even after you have left the group. In this respect, your team must know where the unit is heading, and believe in it. Building this shared understanding and ownership is a leadership responsibility, and in the SAF, this is called having a shared vision.

THE POWER OF VISION... SHARED VISION!

A vision is a picture of the future that you believe the unit can and should become. It should be compelling and clear. It should also be realistic and time-bound. The vision will guide what you will get your unit to do, and how they will do it. It is important to get the vision right early on. For example, a Commanding Officer may envision his unit to be an operationally ready unit of committed citizen soldiers. But it may make a significant difference if his vision focuses on what he wants his unit to be at the end of its 2 year active training cycle, rather than the end of its operationally ready cycle (i.e. after all its in-camp training). Focusing on the end of the two-

Building a shared vision... I think one thing we should know is that the process of building a shared vision is always ongoing, there is no end. I think especially in an organisation like ours, where people also turn around, so it is imperative that the leader must continually engage his team (perhaps many levels down) in dialogues, in conversation, to share and to keep on sharing.

RADM Tay Kian Seng

2. For example, direct leadership is when you say, “I help you clarify your role in relation to me”, while indirect leadership is when you say, “I help you clarify your role in relation to other team members.”

year cycle may lead him to concentrate on doing well for the end of training evaluation and to be “exam-smart”. Focusing on the time beyond the Operationally-Ready Date may lead him to concentrate instead on building the fundamentals of soldier skills and small unit fighting in a variety of operational scenarios, even if those scenarios would not be evaluated at the end of active NS.

Given this understanding of a vision, a shared vision is one that is understood, believed in, and owned by the rest of your leadership team. It cannot just be your own vision, because you cannot otherwise be sure whether your team would direct their effort and thought to accomplish the same things that you want to see achieved in your unit. A compelling and clear vision, once it is adopted by your team, can be a powerful means of motivating them. If they believe in it, the energy and ideas of your team would be

more forthcoming. It would also guide them on what to do in each situation, since the final result would be understood and shared.

Communicating your vision clearly to your team is not as easy as it seems. But more difficult yet is getting them to believe in it and to adopt it as their own. While it is your responsibility to think through the vision on your own, you must bring your team into the conversation of crafting a shared vision early on, and you must also be prepared to invite and to accept some of their ideas to improve the vision. Furthermore, once you and your team have arrived at a (reasonably) shared vision, you will have to persevere in keeping your team’s (and the teams they lead) belief in and movement towards realising the vision. Consistent and regular communication is thus essential for effective indirect leadership.

If you are able, over time, through training, operations, so on and so forth, to show to your people that you know what you are doing, and quite often when you have the time, explain to them the rationale of what you are doing, and therefore they actually now understand you better, you find that when the time comes for them to act without questioning, they will do it, because now they understand you.

RADM Sim Gim Guan

I always explained to my people the rationale behind (things). During the exercise, when I made certain decisions and plans, I would personally stand in front of the entire HQ and explain my thinking and the rationale behind the plan, and why this plan was being conceived that way. I took it as my own personal responsibility to train my HQ. But whenever there was a time crunch, I would make most of the decisions myself, but I would explain the rationale later. When the rationale is clear, they will fight better. My commanders knew how to execute the plan based on my intent. And the team was very close because by the time I fought that exercise I had already been in the division for almost three years. Most of the commanders and NSmen were very close to me, so they understood my intent very well. We had brought the relationship from an official superior-subordinate relationship to a personal level. And they fought with me because they were not only fighting an exercise. They were fighting side by side with a friend, and a comrade.

BG Winston Toh

HOW CAN I CREATE A SHARED VISION WITH MY TEAM?

My theory is this: If you want an innovative and vibrant organisation, you'll need divergence and convergence. You'll want a lot of ideas coming out of the system. But there is no point having a cacophony of noises without the ability to converge in some way...

We need a process for people to throw ideas and everybody to converge on the right thing to do. It doesn't mean consensus or democracy, but an opportunity for everybody to be engaged and to understand the reason behind a decision made. The onus is on the commander to explain effectively the reason for the decision and what he is trying to achieve. He must enable the sharing of ideas by people of different expertise so that there can be many different ideas, and an effective and well-considered decision can be made with everyone rallying around it.

LG Ng Yat Chung

Q: How would you try to strike that balance between “divergence” and “convergence”?

GUIDING YOUR TEAM TO THE FINISH LINE

A typical (but by no means complete) process for guiding your team with a vision would be as follows:

- A. You do your “homework” in thinking through what should be essential elements in your team’s vision.
- B. Your team determines a shared vision.³
- C. Your team sets goals to help realise the vision.
- D. Your team makes plans towards achieving those goals, and implements them.
- E. Your team reviews your unit’s progress and adjusts plans along the way.
- F. You, as the leader, continue to motivate and engage your followers throughout the journey. In addition, you support your team as they motivate their followers.
- G. Your team gets into the habit of celebrating successes, and learning from mistakes – In so doing, figuratively you guide your team all the way to the finishing line.

Remember that with indirect leadership, you should think in terms of helping your subordinate leaders succeed. Throughout the journey, you will need to supervise or even train them, some more closely than others. You will have to ensure that they are properly-resourced, and working together as part of a well-oiled and well-structured system to do what is expected of them. You will also need to provide inspiration and motivation to sustain the belief and confidence of your followers that their

work is both meaningful and achievable.

BEYOND TEAM-BUILDING: OTHER FORMS OF INDIRECT LEADERSHIP

Allow us to recap the definition of indirect leadership, which is to influence people through other people beyond your immediate sphere of influence. We have centred our discussion so far on what you as a leader can do through your team, especially with the aid of a shared vision. Let us suggest a few other approaches to indirect leadership that can magnify your impact as a leader.

Shape the Climate through Symbolic Actions

Have you ever noticed how a single action can shift the climate and mood of a community, and somehow open the flood gates and release people for extraordinary action? Consider the following example:

BG Ravinder recounted a time when he and his team had to present a proposal to develop two new technologies for a similar capability to the Defence Ministers. Each technology option cost millions of dollars but both showed great potential. The team prepared many slides to argue the pros and cons of each option. At the end of a very long discussion, and to the surprise of many in the meeting, the Ministers approved both options, which meant that the Army could develop both technologies further before deciding on which would better serve the Army’s needs. To any observer, it may have seemed like a waste of resources. BG Ravinder reflected that with that single decision, the Ministers had encouraged the Army to push ahead to embrace technology in its capability development. This decision would transform the Army over the next decade.

3. You should get used to the idea that you and your followers make a team. You are not separate from them.



Top: View the WOSpec chain of command as being parallel to the Officer chain of command

With indirect leadership, your actions, even a single action, can communicate a message that will ripple through the chain of command and indirectly influence the whole community. You can play a significant role in defining your unit's work environment to make it more conducive for getting the job done.

Build Continuity for your Team.

As it was with having a shared vision for your team, it is useful to think in terms of a time frame that goes beyond the duration of your tour of duty.

Having this mind-set from the beginning will help you to focus on building a unit that can outlast you.⁴ Continuity can mean strengthening the degree of teamwork as well as the capabilities of individual members of your team – so that they can function effectively when you cannot be present with them. It would also mean doing active Knowledge Management and Transfer so that your successor is better able to continue your work after you leave, and build upon the foundations you have left for him.

Identify and Groom Leaders for the Future

We believe that as you grow as a leader in the military profession, one of the ways in which you can achieve a far-reaching indirect leadership effect is to identify and nurture leaders who serve under you. To identify leaders is to ear-mark individuals for nurturing. And by nurturing, we mean a planned deliberate effort to develop individual leaders. Do not underestimate the impact of intentionally investing in those who serve under you. Your indirect influence will be on the people that those you have nurtured who go on to lead in the future.

Strengthen and Work through your Parallel Chains of Command.

Finally, do not forget the all-important WO-Spec chain of command. BG Hugh Lim aptly recommended that this chain of command should be viewed as a parallel chain, rather than a subordinate one. In so doing, you can empower them to accomplish more than they otherwise would – and further contribute to the ability of your team to excel without you.

4. This is not the same as building monuments to your own name.

**DIRECT AND INDIRECT LEADERSHIP:
ONE SUPPORTS THE OTHER**

We had commented that as you rise in seniority, you would find an increasing need to exercise indirect leadership. Nevertheless, we trust that you have noticed how direct leadership and indirect leadership cannot be utilised separately, but must work in tandem. The skill of a good leader lies in how he can weave these two forms together in a way that is well-adapted for the circumstances of his role.

Even before you are placed in a position where you can make a significant impact on the community, it is wise to use the time as a junior leader to understand the system, to know what needs to be done and what can be done. In effect, your Before-Action-Review as a soon-to-be senior officer starts now.⁵

As you exercise indirect leadership, you still need to engage your followers (even those two or more levels below you) in order to, for example:

1. Understand ground concerns as you determine what to do. (Before Activity Review)
2. Understand ground reactions to what you are doing. (During Activity Review)
3. Supervise to ensure that things are being carried out on the ground as desired. (During Activity Review)
4. Help your followers understand what you want your unit to strive for by living it out yourself (Leadership by example)
5. The Before-Activity-Review is part of the Action Learning Process (ALP). You can find out more about the ALP from the SAF Centre for Leadership Development website.

5. Assess the ground impact of what you have done. (Post Activity Review)

Having a good sense of the pulse on the ground helps to safeguard you from steering your people in a foolhardy direction.

On the flip side of the coin, as you exercise direct leadership, you should always bear in mind what the consequences of your action are from the perspective of indirect leadership.

What kind of implicit messages would you convey by acting in that certain way?

What long term effects, or what kind of climate do you want to shape through your personal example?

What are possible unintended consequences of your words and actions?

After reading this chapter, what reactions do you have towards indirect leadership?

You may have grasped the magnitude of the possibilities in trying to exercise indirect leadership in tandem with direct leadership. You may also have sensed the challenges involved in being a truly effective leader. It is no wonder then that many of the interviewees emphasised the need for leaders to be humble. There is much to learn in order for you to shoulder the increasing responsibilities of direct and indirect leadership – and be able to influence people beyond your immediate sphere for the good of the military profession.

TO REFLECT ON:

After reading Chapters 4 – 6, what, to you, is the greatest challenge of being a direct leader, and of being an indirect leader?

How does the content in Chapters 1 – 3 provide the foundation for you to be an effective direct leader? What about as an indirect leader?

Where do you think you need to develop yourself now in order to be an effective direct leader? What about as an indirect leader?

Now, on staff appointments, people-related work always excites me. I had a fulfilling time as ACGS (Personnel)... it was especially meaningful as during that almost three-year tour, it was a significant period that needed some drastic measures to tackle personnel issues in the Army. Many key manpower policies, including those still in place now, were initiated during that period. Of course, it was really a team effort, and we were privileged to have a supportive MINDEF HQ and the Minister was very enlightened and people-oriented. Policies like the full pension, SAVER Scheme and career development schemes were started then. But I think one aspect that I felt as the most satisfying part of my ACGS (Personnel) experience was the way we began to transform how we manage and motivate National Servicemen, starting with recruits, in view of the changing profile of our servicemen.

BG Ong Boon Hwee

Question: After your tour as a Battery Commander, you were assigned to be a staff officer of a motor and transport unit in G4. What were your feelings about such a transition?

That was a very interesting learning piece. After being an BC, I went on to a staff posting. Like all ambitious young men, I wanted a 'sexy' prestigious appointment... So when the posting came out, mine was a motor transport officer in G4 Army - an administrative job, while my colleagues went on to become Acting Heads of Plans and Doctrine branches. Logistics in those days was considered the backwater of the Army. It was such a blow - that was the only time I considered quitting the SAF..... It turned out to be one of the best postings and learning experiences I had. Because you get into the innards of the Army and learn what it really takes to keep the Army going.

LG Ng Yat Chung

Chapter 7

Leadership in the Office: The Stuff of Our Staffers

When you first signed on as a military officer, did you anticipate having to do staff work?

If you have already completed or are in the midst of a staff tour, what are your feelings about being in that appointment?

For some people, entering a staff appointment for the first time can be quite a transition, especially after they have been in command. They usually find themselves at the “lowest rung” of the officer hierarchy (once again), with few subordinates. One reaction is to “dumb down” and just follow what your immediate boss says – in which case, your experience as a staff officer would become largely dependent on the quality of your relationship with your boss.

Another reaction would be to feel very lost when in a staff position (especially your first tour). It may be a department that you knew little of previously; many of your colleagues may be strangers to you; and you may sense a very steep learning curve ahead of you as you figure out the ropes of the job. You may come to wonder if you would get a positive experience out of being a staffer.

Must this always be the case?

The experiences of LG Ng Yat Chung and BG Ong Boon Hwee (as recounted in pages 93 to 94) suggest that being a staffer can bring about great satisfaction, personal development, and the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the organisation and the military profession. Given that up to two-thirds of an officer’s career would be in a staff position,

this should come as a relief. Beyond that, we believe that you can exercise leadership even in the capacity of a staff officer. Your practice of leadership in a staff context can add to the meaningfulness and satisfaction of your tour, and it can also help to prepare you for a staff leader appointment (i.e. typically Branch head and above).

The aim of this chapter is to broadly discuss how you can demonstrate leadership in a staff position. We hope that this can help you better chart your own development as you transit between command, instructional and staff appointments.

WHAT IS A STAFF OFFICER?

The SAF Dictionary defines Staff Officers in the following manner:¹

Officers who are specifically ordered or detailed to assist the commander in his exercise of command. The staff provides information for the commander, studies the situation continually for anticipatory planning, recommends plans and orders on its own initiative or in response to directives, translates the commander’s decisions into orders and disseminates them thereof, and supervises their execution to ensure adherence and successful execution of the intentions and policies of the commander.

If you want to understand the mechanics of being a good staff officer, we strongly recommend that you read “On Staff Work”, an excellent *POINTER* Supplement written by MG Ng Chee Khern, published in Aug 2009.² Another useful reference would be (then

1. Or more specifically, staff officers who report to a commander. The definition however may be extended (with some adaptation) to cover other staff appointments.
2. Who was very ably assisted, as he himself acknowledged, by his Staff Assistant, MAJ Stanley Chua Hon Keat.

Chief Armour Officer) BG Bernard Tan's "Guidelines to Minute Writing", written in Oct 2003.

We do not intend to replicate what was covered in those publications but to build on them. We will highlight a few aspects of being a leader in a staff position, as corroborated by the interviewees. Furthermore, in early 2010, we conducted a survey of officers (Captain to Major rank) who were holding a staff appointment at that point in time. The experiences of these officers provided an enlightening "ground up" perspective on what good leadership is in a staff position.

STUDY THE DEFINITION OF A STAFF OFFICER

What aspects of being a staff officer relate to leadership behaviours and tasks? What about leadership influence?

How would you apply the SAF Core Values to being a Staff Officer?

By the time you are in Naval Staff, Air Staff, General Staff, Joint Staff, bear this in mind: For issues at hand which you need to tackle, you will have all the facts available, there will be a lot of info, you will have information overload. But then there is another set of perspectives you would need as a leader, and those are the intangibles. These intangibles are shaped by your continual sensing, your experiential sense of leadership, and your own experience. So when you put all these together, it will allow you to have a view of the impact on the people that are going to receive the policies that you are initiating..... You will and must look at things from the angle of "what impact this will have on people". Some of these are really not short term in nature, but can be tremendously long term.

BG Ong Boon Hwee

Connecting experience to staff work

What are the plans and policies that you are trying to implement together with your colleagues and your bosses? What issues are you trying to address, and are they the “right” issues to focus on? What is the likely impact of the plans and policies on the ground, and how will it shape people’s behaviour and thinking?

These are fundamental questions for you as a staff officer to consider. Very often, you will find yourself stepping mid-way into the process of formulating and implementing a plan or a policy. Therefore, to understand what is going on, you will have to trace the history of the discussions and the thinking that have led to the current situation.

More than that, you will have to draw on your own experiences of having been on the ground, all that you know about the organisation and its culture, and of what it means to be in a military profession. Remember that your plans and policies are usually formulated within the confines of an office that is distanced from the ground. How will you get a sense of whether or not your plans or policies will gain a desirable reception (or traction) on the ground?

You must be prepared to engage people and communicate with them to understand the ground sentiments towards what you are proposing, and let that shape the ideas that you will have towards your staff work. This is no different from how leaders need to know the men they lead. Always bear in mind that leadership manifests itself in the formulation and implementation of plans and policies – these can have a far-reaching impact on the organisation.

How do you develop policy, how do you formulate policy? Formulating policy just based on analysis is like formulating something in a vacuum. Formulating policy with an actual sense of what may happen, and (when) you think about what triggered the policy, gives you traction. And in the society that we have today, having traction is fundamental to effective policy. When you have no traction and policy sort of rolls over people’s backs, you can almost do away with the policy... It is about gaining traction, and gaining the right insight, to make sure that you have a deeper and broader base of experience to make the right judgment and decision.

LG Lim Chuan Poh

Bringing in your ideas

Take another look at the definition of a Staff Officer. Consider some ways by which you can introduce your ideas to influence the outcome:³

- Providing information to the commander
- Conducting anticipatory planning
- Recommending plans and orders
- Translating the commander's decisions
- Supervising the execution of intentions and policies

We do not mean that you should try to subtly introduce your ideas just for its sake. What we are saying is that you should not perform your staff duties as a mere “doer”; you must also be a “thinker”. A good staff team is when different minds can come together and collectively derive a better product. There are many aspects of the staff process wherein you can exercise leadership influence.

Speaking up for what you believe in

If your ideas differ from your boss's ideas or instructions, what would you do?

Would you be bold enough to challenge your boss's thinking? Or would you just give regard to the command chain and do as you were told?

BG Ravinder Singh had an interesting approach:

Amongst ourselves as senior signal officers we have a rule. It's a simple rule. You tell the boss three times. “Sir, I don't think that it's a good idea”; “Sir, this is

not a good idea”; “Sir, we should think this through again.” After having told the boss three times and the boss still insists, I will go ahead and do it. If it's successful, it's a great idea; if not, I had done my duty to tell him my opinion.

The idea is not to settle on a fixed number of times to disagree with your boss, but rather to strike a balance between making your views

What would you do if the issue was one of ethics or values?

Q

known and respecting the chain of command to get things done. You might say that this is also akin to influencing your boss – and it is a strong test of one's leadership in staff.

Influencing those around you

Lest we get too carried away focusing on the “work” aspects of being a staff officer, (which touches on indirect leadership), we want to wrap up this discussion by heading back to direct leadership.

Even as a staff officer (possibly the most junior officer in the branch or team), you can still directly influence those around you. If you have subordinates, and they are typically NSFs, specialists or junior DXOs, the danger lies in treating them as a commodity or resource; or worse, as a shared resource within the branch which means the responsibility over them will get diffused. How can you be a better leader for them? How do you think they want to be led?

3. For a more in-depth treatment of the leadership competencies associated with staff appointments, you may check out the SAF Leadership Competency Framework, which specifies 5 competencies and 14 skill sets of a leader.

Furthermore, how might you be able to influence your fellow officers? You are all still accountable to each other as fellow military professionals. You may also have specialised knowledge or unique information that would be relevant to something that your colleague is dealing with, even if it is strictly not within your purview. Offering such help is particularly relevant when you find yourself working with DXOs, who are likely not to have the same amount of organisational knowledge or ground experience as you. This may be particularly useful when you work within a team context – where you can bring to bear your expertise and motivation to help your team achieve a better product.

Finally, we suggest that one person you must consider influencing is your under-study – the one who is going to take over your position. How will you help to prepare him or her to learn the ropes and effectively carry on with the job? We have heard of some staff departments where the cultural norm is that all appointments have a “six month warranty”. Recognising the challenge in any transition, the staff officers would commit themselves to be available for the first six months after they post out to help address queries and resolve issues with their successor. Proper knowledge management and succession of positions is vital – what would you do for yours?

LEADERSHIP AS A STAFF OFFICER – IN SUMMARY

To sum up the foregoing discussion, and to help you remember it, consider the seven pointers given below. Your leadership influence as a staff officer depends on:


- Your understanding of the **ISSUE** (or the **PROBLEM**) at hand in your staff work.
- Your appreciation of and ability to reconcile the **INTENT** (or the **PURPOSE**) of your superiors and of higher HQ as you address the issues together.
- Your ability to formulate, introduce and advocate your **IDEAS** (or the **PROPOSALS**) as staff input in the various stages of the staff process.
- Your ability to anticipate the **IMPACT** (the **POSITIVES** and the **PAIN**) of the plans and policies that your department is rolling out, as well as to assess the actual impact after implementation.
- Your attention and care given to proper **IMPLEMENTATION** (or **PRACTICALITIES**) of plans and policies after they have been approved.
- The constant reminder to yourself that throughout your staff work, you are dealing with **INDIVIDUALS** (or **PEOPLE**) – your superiors, your colleagues, your subordinates, and the actual ones who will be affected by your plans and policies.

EXTRA SECTION: WHEN YOU'RE THE HEAD – LEADING STAFF OFFICERS

How will you lead when you become a Section Head? A Branch Head? A Department Head?

Rather than prescribing a particular approach to leadership, we thought it fitting to conclude this chapter with a selection of quotes on being a leader of staffers. We also included at the end comments given by some staff officers we had surveyed on the positive and negative experiences they have had working with their bosses. Many of these insights would probably apply to being a leader elsewhere in the military profession as well, but we think these would resonate particularly with staffers.

It is our great hope that you would consider these insights, and that as you progress through your career, you may grow as a leader, even as a leader of leaders.


The Context of Leadership as a Staff Officer

When you work in the General Staff, you are working upwards, downwards, sideways. In all dimensions, leadership needs to be exercised. Upwards in terms of advocacy. You are advocating professionally what the force requires, how it needs to be employed, what it needs in terms of resources, political mandate... the Army is interdependent with the Air Force, the Navy, so you have to work across to make sure that the Air Force's and Navy's systems are properly developed and able to interconnect with the Army's... downwards in ensuring that the ground is always well-resourced so that it has what it needs to get the job done.

BG Hugh Lim



The Need for Clear, Consistent and Competent Directions

The staff has to deal with other parts of the SAF and plan together. So without the boss being very clear about the direction, you can imagine they have lots of challenges when they talk to other people because other people are also thinking people. They will also come up with their 'what ifs'. They will also ask what the policy is. So in a sense, when I am able to give them clear directions decisively, it makes their life easier.

RADM Tay Kian Seng

It is important to share with the planners so that they don't go away (questioning) "Wah, why are we doing this?" I can share with you my own negative experience. There are some bosses who just call you up into his office and tell you this was the conversation held at HQ, the minister said this, and whoever said that, please go look at it. The only reason given "is Minister say". Instead go think about why we need to do it, and come up with the options.

RADM Tay Kian Seng



Balancing Empowerment and Decisiveness

If you are in a staff job that requires long-term planning, you are better off having a thorough brainstorming and discussion to make sure the solution you come up with is robust. So you should never stifle that kind of thinking, you should never stifle that kind of discussion. But in jobs where timing is critical, where you can't afford to fail, you just have to manage it differently because your margin for error is very limited.

RADM Tan Kai Hoe

I love yes men better than those (who) constantly disagree with me. But what I love better than yes men, are people who say: "Sir, I hear you, but this is what I think." And I love the best those who say: "Sir, I hear you, this is what I think, and I respect the decision we've come to, and I'm fully committed." There are a lot of people who tell you what they think without listening to you or who tell you what you want to hear. You really need those who understand your concerns and thinking, and will tell you that you are making a mistake. However you also don't want people to disagree with you and stop there. You want people who will come to a decision with you, and commit fully to it even if they disagree. The last thing you want in an organisation is when everybody appears to agree to a decision, and you have some individual who does not commit fully to it in action and speech. We must create a process for people to be able to throw ideas and assume collective responsibility for the decision we converge on.

LG Ng Yat Chung

The way I motivated (my staff) was to bring them into the conversation as early as possible and share with them my thinking. This was an opportunity for them to also tell me how they feel but ultimately I had to be quite decisive to say “ok, this is what I want you to do.” So it’s not just like telling them without them participating in the thinking process. What I tried to do was to share with them the way I look at the issues, how I interpret the policy, objective and implications. Then frame the whole thing for them so they can work out the details. That to me is important.

RADM Tay Kian Seng

I believe the idea here is also one of trusting to a large extent your people. We talk about empowerment, we talk about making sure that we don’t micromanage, and allow our people to develop. And I think empowerment does not mean dispensation of accountability but rather it can come about when you have a deeper understanding of the capability of your people, what they can do.

...Through empowerment, a person who feels that he is empowered is also prepared to take up the mantle of leadership. In that process you also develop your next layer as leaders.

RADM Sim Gim Guan



Build Teamwork

And I think the important thing is how to build a team. Teamwork. I believe in teamwork. Everywhere I go I like to build, I like to have people working together...

...So... we were able to build a better team between the logistics and the naval officers, the operations people. And you know then we came to a stage where we said “Ok, anything goes wrong I’m not so interested at who is at fault I want to know how to sort this problem out so how do we solve this problem” and logistics and operation people have to get together and the operations officer will have to say, “Ok I can accept this problem” and the logistics officer, “Oh I can solve it for him this way,” things like that. So eventually we built a team.

RADM Kwek Siew Jin



Positive Experiences shared by other Staff Officers

I enjoy the mental sparring with my counterparts and bosses and at the end of the day, coming up with something which is meaningful.

Clear direction and guidance given by boss while at the same time allowing for collaborative discussion.



Negative Experiences shared by other Staff Officers

Stove-piped thinking by Branch Heads and not wanting to help others. Not wanting to change or accept radical ideas.

One of the greatest challenges is changing expectations of commanders which results in difficulties meeting their intent.

Unclear direction and slow turnaround. It's also tough not getting clear directions or when your boss' 'bandwidth' is so soaked up that your project is put on hold and you are not getting the necessary guidance.

With regard to staff work, I'll say the boss plays an important role. Most importantly, he needs to show his interest and provide CPG for the content that you are going to write in the paper. I had a bad experience with a boss that asked you to just write and do your research even though he had his own ideas and eventually whatever you did was a waste of time. Another bad experience was a boss who showed no interest in your work. He could even say things like "don't come and bother me".

The challenge is as we go up, you are a leader/manager. In fact, a leader plus manager because you do both things.

If somebody you have tasked to do something cannot deliver on time, you have given him an extension and he still is unable to deliver – as a manager, one would have to decide how long this can go on. ‘Okay I give you another chance. That’s it, and I’ll get you off the job’. That’s a management decision.

When you take a leadership position, you would say ‘Alamak, why ah, why is he not able to do this? Was I not clear in my directions? Or is he having some other challenges?’ So the manager basically manages resources, money, materials and manpower. But being a leader is about the management of the intangibles. So it’s about managing, you know, or maybe leveraging, dealing with values, commitment, purpose, aspirations. That is the distinction.

When you see yourself as a leader, you will do things differently. If you see yourself as a manager, you do things differently. So the challenge for people in staff appointments, department heads, formation commanders, when you have staff responsibilities, the challenge is for you to be able to understand that you are both a leader and a manager.

You need to have good management skills: writing, planning, organising, scheduling, allocating resources and so on.

But when it comes to being a good leader, you must then stop and think about how all the things I am doing is going to affect the morale. All the things that you are asking the people to do, your actions and so on, reflects your values, affects commitment, and how the work is purposeful. What we leverage is the inherent desires to want to contribute, to want to make a difference. Those are the tasks of the leader; how do you leverage those to make people more effective, to make people feel, in a sense happier, more committed, more engaged.

You have this challenge when you move up.

RADM Tay Kian Seng

REFLECTIONS BY HEAD SAF CENTRE FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

As we commented in Chapter 1, leadership is a journey.

The personal leadership journey taken by Colonel Sukhmohinder Singh, Head SAF Centre for Leadership Development (CLD), has been a long and seasoned one – He is currently one of the longest serving officers in the SAF in active service. When we asked him to share his personal reflections to wrap up the discussion in this book, he found himself taking a walk down memory lane, recalling some key moments that had defined his leadership journey and philosophy.

He further offers personal ‘journeying’ advice for you - the aspiring SAF leader – concluding with the final encouragement to learn from the wisdom and value of the interviewees and other “old men of the SAF”.

The WO Corps as my role models, teachers and anchors.

When I joined the Commandos after graduating from OCS, I was immersed in an environment where both the Officers and WO’s were professional and experienced. My Platoon Sergeant and Company Sergeant-Major (CSM) both had experience far in excess of mine. They not only role-modelled professional behaviour but also demanded it of me as they took it upon themselves to train and nurture me. How I dressed, my punctuality and my style were all part of the personal interest they took in my development.

I remember my best Regimental Sergeant-Major (RSM), Warrant Officer (WO) Sam Choo. He was an expert and also a real fun guy to be around. We would all call him Sam

in the mess. One day as he was walking in the parade square in his No 3 and in shining boots, I called out to him from outside the parade square by his first name, Sam. He made an immediate turn to the left, marched smartly towards me, came to a precise halt, saluted me and sharply reminded me that I will not address him as Sam when he was on official duty. He ended by respectfully calling me “Sir”. I automatically came to attention, saluted him and acknowledged him with a, “Yes Encik”. He then saluted, turned around smartly and went about his work.

Since then, I have always been reminded of the fact that the WO Corps is and must always be the custodian of our cultural artefacts, our profession, our identity, our ethos and be deep experts in soldiering skills, just as much as it is demanded of Officers.

I do know that I gained the respect of my warrant officers and specialists then (i.e. my Platoon Sergeant and my first CSM) by first and foremost being physically fit and being ready to lead and to push, being present for all activities with the men and ever ready to learn from them about the finer points of how to train the men, how to expertly conduct cliff and heli-rappelling. I always challenged them in physical training (PT), because I came into the Commandos not meeting the chin-up and swimming standards. However, by the time I completed my Commando conversion course, I had met both standards and for this, the warrant officers played a critical role.

I have been at times referred to as “RSM Sukh”. I make no apologies and in fact take pride in it. Even till today as Head CLD, I still

remind people to put on their head-dress, because I was taught that if we cannot follow the most basic tenets of our discipline, then how can we be trusted to live by other values we espouse during the times where lives will be at risk? These are soldier and leader fundamentals, and fundamentals are key to combat effectiveness.

My emphasis on fundamentals was vindicated when my infantry battalion became not only the Best Infantry but also the Best Combat Unit of the SAF. It was our strict adherence to the values of Leadership by Example, Discipline, Fighting Spirit and Safety coupled with very strong soldier fundamentals up to the Company level that got us there. We were strong physically - our IPPT and SOC results showed that - and we were great shooters. Finally, we tested ourselves at every level from section upwards, and every time a level did not meet the mark - we'd redo the test. We ran skill-at-arms challenges to build foundational skills at the section-level in preparation for what was then Stage 1 ATEC.¹

The battalion that I commanded continued to win the NS Battalion of the year award 6 times in a row and scored a high 2A in their NS ATEC. They outperformed an Active Battalion in their 3rd In-Camp Training that was during an overseas Brigade exercise, where they manoeuvred to the rear speedily and aggressively. Our overseas consultant commented that in all his time in the SAF he had never seen a battalion fight with such spirit and professionalism. The battalion had the fortune of the great presence and competence of their CAH²/NS Commanding Officers (COs).

My Brigade S3 was their 1st CAH CO and he knew the battalion. The following two NS CO's were outstanding. But more important was the **presence** of the original section commanders, Platoon Sergeants and CSMs who came from their cohort and an outstanding NS RSM. The **Warrant Officers** and **specialists** in the Battalion were the backbone to this continued success and effectiveness, because they held strongly to their values and practices and made sure that all new "**imports**" were brought into their fold and not otherwise. I remember when I visited them at their Concentration in the field before the NS ATEC started, the men and commanders showed me how their SBO's were on their bodies and nowhere else because that was our Operational SOP.³ When they went into the MINDEF Reserve two years ago, I addressed them and reminded them that **they** - the men, the **Warrant Officers** and **Specialist** and their CO's had lived up to their Vision which they had built when they first started and now they left as they started - a **battalion to be respected**. They left with **respect** and were **respected**.

Singing

I learned from my first CSM the power of cadence when leading men on runs. Whenever my CSM joined us for runs, the men experienced a surge of energy and motivation from his singing and his challenges, made with a hoarse and captivating voice. Since then I have always taken great joy in leading my men in song during runs, to spur them on and to lead by example. They connected with me as much as I did with them and this easily led to my commanders also taking the lead themselves rather than delegating the task to the men. This was about engaging and communicating and also about

1. Army Training Evaluation Center
2. Concurrent Appointment Holder
3. Skeletal Battle Order

the point that there are things that we – the Officer Corps – never stop doing just because we are no longer cadets. I did this even with the participants of the SAF Scholar Leadership Development Program, where I not only asked them to lead in songs but also led them in my favourite, “C-130 rolling down the street”.

Command Presence

As a young officer I was taught that leadership by example was not just about being present with the men, but also what you do when you are with them.

Firstly, by being present, you get to see and feel the state of training and morale of your men. It is about first being ready to listen, see and feel the ground truth, because you see things that no one else may pick up had they been your substitute. This is critical so that the actions you take as a commander is spot on.

This has remained integral to my leadership and command philosophy.

I remember during Section training as a CO, I visited the Company Commander (OC) conducting the training. When I arrived at his location, he was comfortably on his hammock with his radio set next to him. Since he had dispatched the sections and put the enemy simulators in place, he thought he could get down to reading his comics (of which he had a dozen on the floor). He could have been described as being in Control. However, he was definitely not in command.

I rectified the situation by doing a check on his knowledge of his section commanders (i.e. their names, their strengths and weakness and

their demonstrated competence). He could not provide me satisfactory answers. With that, he scurried to follow each of them for the rest of the day.

He had a belief that as an OC, his responsibility was just to manage things because the Platoon Commander (PC) and Platoon Sergeant would know what to do. He learnt very quickly that a basic principle of developing and knowing the state of your unit was only effectively achieved by always being present at least 2 levels down. He had a responsibility not only to get his sections trained, but to also train his PCs and Platoon Sergeants, and know the ground truth regarding the effectiveness of his training design. It was not about meddling but knowing the real situation on the ground and being ready to guide and subsequently to review his theories of success for continued effectiveness.

My buddy whom I respect greatly, COL Yeo Eidik always shared that to be effective as a Leader and Commander in the SAF, “*You have to first love people, being with them, engaging them, developing them and then leading all of them, without leaving anyone of them behind.*”

Another example of seeking the ground truth was when my unit was 6 months old. As CO, I spoke to each Platoon personally without the commanders being present except the OC or CSM. During these conversations I had time to explain the “why” behind what we were doing.

It also gave me time to hear them and get their feedback. I remembered in one of these conversations, a soldier told me that he did

not have enough uniforms for training. When I checked further with him, I found out that he had 2 uniforms kept away for the standby bed and the standby full-pack. He had also gotten one of his uniforms cut up because he had heat exhaustion two weeks ago and had not received his replacement uniform. It was clear that the OC and CSM were NOT carrying out their responsibilities and were not yet aligned with the Battalion Vision and Values. All this feedback was rectified immediately and it boosted the confidence of the men in the system and in our espoused values.

Feedback and Learning – Our Conviction

It was in my Commando ‘DNA’ to conduct After Action Reviews (AARs) after all exercises. We engaged in activities that were high risk and therefore learning from each of them was in our blood. During AARs, we were not concerned with being polite when we had to give feedback on negative behaviour or performance. I learned from my Commando warrant officers and specialists to take punches and give them too, always in a respectful manner.

I remembered that I had a habit of being late. My Platoon Sergeant addressed this bad habit of mine by taking the platoon out for training without me when I was late. I realised that I was late, so I rode my bike to the training area, much to my embarrassment. He had made his point. I never repeated it and it was water under the bridge.

Giving and receiving feedback became part of me. As a CO, I made it mandatory to have AARs after all training. During our cycle of section combat course training, I made sure each night when the company returned from training, they headed straight to the cookhouse for a breakout AAR, facilitated by

PCs from the other companies. I personally watched this activity with the OC. We then brought the learning for collective sharing, transfer and review of our SOPs. The PCs from all the other Companies who had participated went on to improve their practices and we collectively built an alignment of our processes and practices. This was replicated at all levels of training. It required personal attention from my S3 and me to design and make the time available. We also had to skill the junior commanders on the learning habits we used in the Commandos.

Likewise, as a Brigade Commander, I ran my exercises for the Battalion with the same structure. We would put aside a day to consolidate all the learning for each group and at each level. This was supported by the AARs we did at each phase. More importantly, like I did with my OCs as a CO, I held one-on-one coaching conversations with my COs after the unit matters had been settled.

For all young leaders leaving OCS to assume your first command, here’s a guide to preparing and building a refined strategy for successful entry into all commands:

1. Know the mission, vision, values and focus of the unit you are posting to and their stage of training.
2. Know what and who you will be responsible for, their size and composition.
3. Know who will supervise you and who you need to work with closely.
4. Learn from the experience of others on how to best prepare for your command, just like you would for a mission.

5. Formulate your theory and plan (especially in the first 100 days) for successful entry into your command.
6. Seek an interview with your CO or immediate supervisor to get their guidance and understand their expectations of you and their vision for the unit.
7. Be quick to learn from the other Officers, outgoing PC and the WOs. Listen actively and genuinely and ask questions to help you sharpen your theory for success. Be curious especially about the men and the commanders so that you can break in effectively.
8. Finally, go in physically strong. In your first PT you want them to respect you and be clear that you can lead, by leading in singing. This will also serve to imprint your own readiness to lead with confidence.

The SAF's power to shape and create buy in with the Generation Y

I would like to conclude with a story of my nephew's life-changing experience in Basic Military Training (BMT).

He completed his BMT in late January. He had studied in New Zealand for his 'A' levels while he trained with an expert squash coach. Upon his return, while waiting for his NS, he had surgery done for his injuries from playing squash. His peers who were already in NS urged him to get his medical downgrade so as to cruise through NS. He was tempted, as he was keen to continue his efforts in being the best squash player in the country and did

not want NS to interfere with that aspiration. However, his father and I thought otherwise. We spent time to coach and challenge him to find out what he was made of by committing to complete his BMT. We worked on his NAPFA test and he eventually got into the nine-week PES A/B1 BMT.

In BMT, he had a positive experience. He appreciated the discipline, newfound comradeship and well-organized training. He also renewed confidence in himself as he realised that he could undergo all the training with ease. He achieved IPPT Gold and passed all his tests. His defining moment was when his Platoon Sergeant, who was a regular Guardsman, returned from a course two weeks before they completed their BMT. He saw in his Platoon Sergeant a professional in action, from whom he learnt about soldiering and the attributes of a leader, and by whom he was impressed.

From a cynic who had doubts about the value of NS, he emerged from BMT convinced that NS was going to make him a better person who would acquire lifelong lessons that would serve him well in his life. His mother was amazed and his father was proud.

His transformation was due to several reasons. It was partly the collective effort of his father and my weekly conversations with him. But the key was the experience he actually went through during BMT. The positive and professional conduct of all that he had encountered in BMT, and the role-modelling by the Platoon Sergeant made the real difference.

After my nephew's experience in BMT, I am convinced that when leaders are present and ready to lead, when we lead by our professed

values and our profession, we will be a force to be reckoned with in our contribution to the commitment to the defence of our young, their parents, their friends and our future generations.

However, when we fail to care for the sons of our citizens as we would our families, we lose the initiative and they will act to preserve themselves. They will not be prepared to make the sacrifice to serve wholeheartedly in service of our nation. It is leadership that will determine the outcome.

Old Men of the SAF

The Minister Mentor (MM), in his recent book “Hard Truths”, shared that our continued existence could only be sustained if we remained strong in our fundamentals, in spite of the fact that this generation of young Singaporeans have not experienced hardship. He wrote, “My abiding concern for Singapore arises from my belief that the younger generation, especially those below 35, have never seen the harsh economic conditions. They therefore do not know the threats we face from neighbouring countries.”⁴

What were these fundamentals?

MM explained:

We need a sturdy, strong and capable SAF, not only to defend Singapore but return blow for blow when necessary. If we do not have this strong SAF, we are vulnerable to all kinds of pressures.” Furthermore, he wrote, “The economy and defence are

closely interlinked... Without a strong economy, there can be no strong defence. Without a strong defence, there can be no Singapore.

I am also reminded of a Straits Times article written by Rachel Lin, where she wrote about how she saw our country as being “no country for old men”.⁵ In it, she reflected that though some of the political old guard had stories to tell, she feared that “they will take their stories to the grave with them as this was no country for old men – or old women too, for that matter”.⁶ She went on to add that “we pay too little attention to their lives. We let them flicker out, one by one, with hardly a thought of what we might lose when they are gone.” This passing, she commented, was “the passing of an era, the slow erosion of the kinds of shared memory that make a nation: recollection of past struggles, a window into common history.”

MM said that we are not a nation. Perhaps that is true, if only because we are unwilling – or unable – to do our own remembering. As Rachel Lin commented, “Nations are made when a group of people feel that they have something in common. A vital part of this is an emotional link to a common past, an emotional investment in a shared destiny. But we no longer put human faces to past events. We stop short of giving our heritage an emotive force. We study dates and events, dull as dish-water, dry as dust, with no thought for the power of individual human lives, resurrected.

4. This and other quotes by Minister Mentor were cited from: Han, Fook Kwang; Ibrahim, Zuraidah; Chua, Mui Hoong; Lim, Lydia; Low, Ignatius; Lin, Rachel and Chan, Robin. (2011) Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going. Singapore: Straits Times Press. pp. 10 – 11.
5. Lin, Rachel. (2011, February 22). No Country for Old Men. The Sunday Times. pp. 33.
6. Lin, Rachel. Ibid.

We let the march of time claim the last living representatives of our history. We close our books and forget.”⁷

The SAF is a microcosm of our society. We may also suffer from this inability or desire to do our own remembering. We may risk a collective amnesia of our history and the roots of our profession as was professed by the late Dr Goh Keng Swee. Ours is fundamentally about a calling and a preparedness to serve and sacrifice first. This is not much different from what MM alluded to regarding the calling to be in political office. It is not about being popular or self-serving. This is a lifelong endeavour. This book, “Called to Lead”, is our testimony regarding the wisdom and value of the Old Men of the SAF.

In reaching back to our past leaders, one of them, when contacted, was very pleased that finally someone in the SAF wanted to speak to him about his experiences and his memories of what it took to get the SAF started. The “Old Men” of the SAF whose interviews are featured here all share a common values system and belief about what it was to be a Leader and what it took to make the SAF such a success story. They represent but just a small group of the Old Men of the SAF, but they have in my view provided me (and I trust, many current and future leaders) deep insights on the enduring qualities and practices of effective leaders. There are clear themes from all 11 of them while at the same

time there are many views and ideas of how we can continue to remake ourselves with the diversity that exists.

This book is a ‘must read’, and there is also a ‘must do’ follow up to reach out to more of our ‘Old Men”. This includes the **warrant officers** and **specialists** group who remind us and anchor us as we make new pathways for our continued effectiveness in service of defending our national uniqueness that will always leave us vulnerable.

A Leader in the SAF will be a Leader Anywhere.

7. Lin, Rachel. Ibid.

ANNEX A: WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FIT – PERSPECTIVES FOR THE PROFESSIONAL

This is an important matter that impacts all of us!

We recognise that we cannot properly consider the scope of being a military professional and leader in the SAF without addressing the issue of work-life balance as well. Each of our lives consists of certain aspects that lie apart from our work. Yet it is easy to get so caught up and absorbed in work that one gets burnt out and jaded, or worse still, jeopardises the other parts of one's life. It does neither yourself nor the organisation any good when that happens.

Is it possible to be serious as a military professional, and yet be successful in the other areas of your life?

This is really a question that applies to any profession, and while it is beyond the scope of this book to go deep into the topic, we can share some words of advice from the interviewees.

It is true that the organisation plays an important role in managing the training and operations tempo. Your sense of duty will make it hard for you to turn down an organisational demand. However, it is important for you to determine your own life philosophy and carve out your personal work-life balance.

Here are some words of advice from the interviewees that can aid you in crafting your philosophy:¹

1. You need to prioritise your life, and put career in its proper place.

LG Ng Yat Chung recounted a story told by the former CEO of Coca Cola, Bryan Dyson – He described life as being a game where 5 balls need to be juggled – work, family, friends, health, and spiritual life. Work is a rubber ball, even if its dropped, it will bounce back. The other 4 balls – family, friends, health and spiritual life – are glass balls. Once dropped, they will be damaged in some way. They will not be the same again. How you juggle the balls is up to you. The key lesson here is that when you've paid enough attention to the glass balls, the rubber ball can be sorted out. You cannot do it in reverse. If something is high enough as a priority, you will find the time for it.

Even after defining work as a rubber ball, there may be parts of the military profession that you would define as a priority. It could be command responsibility. It could be operational duty. You should clearly define it. Then you will be better able to weigh it up when you face dilemmas of conflicting demands on your time.

2. Choose your battles wisely.

Even after you have identified your glass balls and rubber balls, there will still be tension. This is because you will often feel that you have many things that you think you ought to do (e.g. because of your professional calling), but not enough time or energy to do them all. In the context of your profession, you'll find yourself having to go into a deeper resolution about which elements are more important

1. You will notice that the main life priority we've highlighted concerns one's family – that can be readily substituted in the discussion with any other aspect of life that you consider to be essential.

than the others. In operational terms, you will be more effective in your work when you identify your critical and key terrain, and focus your energies in those directions.

Some battles also cannot be won. Even if you feel strongly compelled to do something, the time and circumstance may not be right, and you will find yourself wasting effort if you pressed on. The most you may be able to do is to lay the foundations for the battle to be fought and won at a later time. Either way, it helps to be thoughtful about which battles you will fight, and how you will fight them.

3. You can find balance, if not in the short term, then at least in the long term. But you must plan for it.

It may not be easy to establish a daily or weekly balance in time for your various priorities. But you may consider how to achieve some balance over a longer span of time (e.g. a quarterly or biennial balance). You can create pockets of time between periods of high training and operations tempo, especially when you are the leader.

You must plan for it. Failing to plan means giving your family and other priorities left-over time.

4. You cannot live life sequentially. You cannot always trade quantity with quality.

By this, we mean that you cannot live life as if you can focus on your work for a season, and then try to make up for it with your family at a later season. Neither can you always explain away your lack of time commitment to family by compensating with “quality” when you do spend time with them.

Why? The reason is simply because some things in life simply cannot be repeated. Your wife’s pregnancy; your child’s growing up years; a family celebration or a family crisis. If you were not there, you were not there.

Some have likened the solution to a “staggered simultaneous” manoeuvre – which means the artful interweaving of time for work and time for other aspects of your life.

5. Build your “Home Front”.

It helps to have an understanding and supportive family – they are, so to speak, your home front. To this end, your choice of a spouse matters a lot. More than that, you must also help to prepare your family for the realities of your profession. Does this imply that your family will inevitably be “short-changed”? We think not, but there is a caveat, which BG Ravinder Singh expressed well. He stressed that as a leader in the SAF, you must be prepared to sacrifice. However, you must likewise be prepared to sacrifice for your family. This is selflessness being practiced in every priority of your life, and it can go some way in fostering your family’s understanding and support.

ANNEX B: GLOSSARY OF LEADERSHIP TERMS

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WORKSHEET – EXCERPTS OF LANDMARK DOCUMENTS FOR THE SAF MILITARY PROFESSION

CODE OF CONDUCT (COC) FOR THE SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES, 1ST EDITION, MAY 1967

INTRODUCTION

The object of the Code of Conduct for the Singapore Armed Forces is to provide a guide to members of the Armed Forces to enable them to know the standard of conduct and behaviour expected of them. Members of our Armed Forces are expected not only to be efficient fighting men and women, skilled in the art of war, but also to be an example of good citizenship and an embodiment of the values and principle of a free, democratic and progressive nation. On the shoulders of members of the Armed Forces falls the responsibility for the defence of our country against armed attack from without and subversion from within. This is a heavy responsibility and to be able to carry out this responsibility, members of the Armed Forces must be well disciplined not only in the military virtues but also in the mores of our society. Members of the Armed Forces are expected to cultivate good relationships with the civilian public and the Code will make an attempt to define these relationships.

It is a great privilege to serve in the Singapore Armed Forces. The strength of a nation cannot be measured by its material resources alone. It is a reflection of the very strength and fibre of the people themselves. Both in actual size and actual numbers of population, we may be the smallest nation in Asia. But the quality of our people should be second to none. However, quality alone without the training and discipline which are relevant would have no significance for our future well-being in Singapore. Therefore, it is imperative that we must develop our human resources and ensure that we have a generation of young people who can meet the challenge of nationhood. In the days when Singapore was a Colony, we were under the control of the colonial power ruling from thousands of miles away. Today, however, the situation has changed. We are one nation, one people, and our Armed Forces are to defend and serve our people – the Citizens of Singapore. That is the role of the members of our Armed Forces. They are not only the protector of the citizens but are a vital force in the community and an example for all to follow.



The SAF Code of Conduct comprised six rules of conduct as summarised below:

1. We will always Honour our Nation. We will do everything to uphold it and nothing to disgrace it.
2. At all times, we must bear in mind that we are protectors of our citizens.
3. We are loyal to the armed forces, and we take pride in our unit, our uniform, our discipline, our work, our training and ourselves.
4. We must be exemplary in our conduct. We respect others and by our conduct and bearing win the respect of others.
5. We are courageous but not reckless. We are devoted to duty but not to ourselves.
6. We guard our weapons as we guard secrets.

Q1. In what ways does the role of the SAF go beyond defence of the nation?

Q2. Who in the SAF has set for you a positive example of living by the Code of Conduct?

Q3. How would you rate yourself in living by the Code of Conduct?

Q4. Where do you think you need to improve in terms of setting a positive example yourself?

Q

THE SINGAPORE ARMY BILL (DECEMBER 1965)

... The position we are facing in Singapore today is, of course, completely different from that of dynastic struggles in ancient China... Our army is to be engaged in the defence of the country and our people against external aggression. This task we are unable to do today by ourselves. It is no use pretending that without the British military presence in Singapore today, the island cannot be easily over-run by any neighbouring country within a radius of 1,000 miles, if any of them cared to do so...

... British military protection today has made quite a number of our citizens complacent about the need to conduct our own defence preparations. These people assume that this protection will be permanent. I regard it as the height of folly to plan our future on this assumption and, indeed, the only rational basis on which we, as an independent country, can plan its future is on the opposite assumption, i.e., the removal of the British military presence at some time in the future. Nobody, neither we nor the British, can say when this will be. It may be five, ten, fifteen years, maybe more, maybe less. Whatever the time may be, it would be useless then to think about building up your defence forces. The time to do so is now. The Bill before the House provides for the establishment and maintenance of the Singapore Army.

Speech by Minister of Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee, in Parliament on 23 Dec 1965

Q

Q1. Why was the Singapore Army raised?
Does that reason still apply today?

Q2. How personally convinced are you of
the need for the SAF?

SPEECH BY DR GOH KENG SWEE, MINISTER OF DEFENCE, AT THE ARMED FORCES' DAY PARADE, JULY 1971

“...The status of the SAF in society has to be defined more clearly. A community of traders with no military tradition, which Singapore is, has little conception of the role of the military. Some businessmen are apt to regard soldiers as little better than jagas. They know little about the motivations of the military profession. They know nothing about how a defence force operates. It is in the interest of the SAF to dispel this ignorance and to make itself better understood by the civilian population. ... A great deal remains to be done before the military profession can occupy the honoured position in society that it does in modern states. It is one of my responsibilities as the Republic's Defence Minister to help shape more positive attitudes towards the military profession. But every soldier, every NCO and every officer must conduct himself at all times in a manner that reflects credit on the SAF.”

Q1. What did Dr Goh envision the status of the SAF in Singapore society to be?

Q2. How can you help to influence the perceptions of the military profession held by those around you?

Q3. What will you do more of, or less of, to bring credit to the SAF?

THE SAF DECLARATION

- The Singapore Armed Forces is the military arm in the Total Defence of Singapore. We work towards an operational readiness that can deter aggression and a military capability that can act decisively should deterrence fail. Alert and prepared, we ensure the security and survival of our nation. We derive our strength from all sectors of society. From our fellow citizens, we seek support and trust.
- To them, we pledge service and dedication. Together, we ensure that our nation continues to progress and prosper in peace.
- We train as a Unit, a Service and an Armed Force. We muster our collective strength and will to build a cohesive and effective fighting force. With the best possible equipment, and realistic demanding training, we strive to be always ready for our mission.
- We are committed to developing our people to their fullest potential. Money, materials, and machines are important in defence but they will be useless without the vital human element.
- We value our people. We look after them, and their families, so that they can give wholehearted attention to their assigned duties.
- Our strength lies in the quality of our people. We expect our regulars, volunteers, NSmen, and NSFs always to do their best.
- Our regulars provide continuity and expertise as instructors, specialist staff officers and senior commanders. They are the backbone of the SAF, giving direction and stability, setting the lead in conduct and character, able to respond immediately in any emergency.



- Our NSmen are frontline soldiers, trained, equipped and ready to defend our homeland. Annual training is necessary to keep NSmen fighting fit. But time is limited. So commanders have to plan well. And NSmen have to perform well.
- Our full-time national servicemen train to be effective soldiers. They are young citizens learning to live and work together for the well-being of our nation. Neglect of training during full-time national service means much effort to make up in national service. An unfit and poorly trained soldier is a danger to himself and his comrades.
- We believe that sound leadership and good management will make the most of our limited manpower. Through people-oriented management, leadership by example, and discipline, we instil commitment and confidence, pride in service, and team spirit.

We are the Singapore Armed Forces, first and foremost in the defence of Singapore.

Launched on 29 June 1984

Q1. What is expected of an SAF military professional? Does this declaration need to be modified for today's context?

Q2. Who are the exemplary SAF personnel that you know who live out this Declaration well? How so?

Q3. To what extent have your own actions been consistent with the SAF Declaration?

Q4. Moving forward, how would the SAF Declaration guide the way you do your work?

Q

THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

I, having entered the service of the Republic of Singapore under the Enlistment Act, do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Republic of Singapore; protect and defend the Republic of Singapore bravely and intelligently, with virtue and honour, not sparing my life blood in so doing; to my last breath be devoted to the people, the country and the Government of the Republic of Singapore; be loyal to the country and the Government of the Republic of Singapore; be ready, at the order of the Government, to rise up to the defence of the Republic of Singapore; be honourable, brave, disciplined and vigilant; obey the laws of the Republic of Singapore and comply with the orders of my commanders; and strictly safeguard and preserve State secrets and official information and never disclose them.

THE SAF PLEDGE

We, members of the Singapore Armed Forces, do solemnly and sincerely pledge that we will always bear true faith and allegiance to the President and the Republic of Singapore. We will always support and defend the Constitution. We will preserve and protect the honour and independence of our country with our lives.

Q

Q1. What is the most impactful line in the Oath of Allegiance to you? How about the SAF Pledge?

Q2. How comfortable are you with reaffirming the Oath of Allegiance and SAF Pledge for yourself?

Q

Taken together, can you put down in words what it means to be a military professional?

What must a military professional be prepared to do?

How prepared are you to be a military professional?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to express our appreciation for the following persons who contributed substantially to the making of this book.

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