



By Mike Karlson

As the Army addresses and implements the findings of the [Fort Hood Independent Review Committee](#), the conversation across our formations is centered on leadership. What went wrong? What kind of leadership is required to protect our Soldiers, keep the faith and trust of the American public, and inspire future Soldiers to join our ranks? Ineffective leadership is certainly a component of those events however, more just talking about “effective leadership” alone will not take the Army where it needs to go. Imagine leadership as an actual ship, the ‘Leader-ship’ if you will. That single ship can withstand quite a bit, but it does have its limits. There are also two more ‘ships’ of equal importance that need to be included in this ‘armada’: mentorship and stewardship. The armada of leadership, mentorship, and stewardship is the powerful combination we need to take the Army out of the storm it finds itself amidst, and into, a limitless future.

Why has the conversation on leadership grown stale? Make no mistake, the Army runs on leadership. The Army will always need leaders. However, leadership can be an overused term. It can have an assumed ubiquitous understanding that prevents honest discussions on how its context changes over time. I am not solely referring to how leadership changes at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, rather, I am referring to the 'heart and soul' of leadership and how it can and should 'feel' differently over the course of one's career.

'Heart, soul, feel'...you will not find any of these terms in Army leadership doctrine. However, they are the intangible facets of "self" that make people who they are. Over time, leaders refresh their own thoughts on leadership, beyond just the mechanics, and grow those ideas to affect organizational change as their levels of responsibility increase. I am limited to the scope of my own experiences, but I do have some thoughts by way of the aforementioned allegory to that process of change. But first, more on the 'Leader-ship'.

Imagine very rough seas. It is dark, the waves are massive, and it is virtually impossible to tell which heading might lead to calmer waters. For the sake of this metaphor, let's say the 'Leader-ship' is a sailboat. This sailboat is getting tossed about, its sails are violently flapping in the wind with the main mast creaking ominously. The 'Leader-ship' does have options at its disposal, but those options are all heavily dependent on external conditions. It can change the orientation of its sails or move the rudder in a particular direction but those actions might prove to be fruitless in a big storm. The 'Leader-ship' is like actual leadership in a sense. There are options at one's disposal. Those options, expertly applied by dedicated professionals, usually work. The basic tenets and mechanics of leadership should be learned and internalized at the beginning of one's career. Leadership is important. Leadership is always required. However, the conversation needs to be rejuvenated or risk coming across as stale, tired, and ultimately ineffective. "When *Leader Development is in everything we do,*" going to the range is leader development; so is doing PT and inspecting vehicles. Leader development has evolved to encompass everything except the very activity its name implies - teaching our people *how* to be good leaders." This excerpt from ["Have We](#)

[Removed Leadership from Leader Development](#)" underscores the need to renew the leadership discussion and consider other "ships" going forward.

Now imagine the same storm. The waves are just as massive but this time we are picturing a different ship. We'll call it the 'Mentor-Ship'. This ship is powered by an engine. It has a hull designed to cut through waves, it has a tight skilled crew that like you knows how to deal with rough seas and is designed to right itself when it gets pushed too far in one direction or another. Mentorship is a form of leadership to be sure, but should be viewed as a separate concept entirely. It's distinct from the aforementioned 'Leader-ship' because mentorship is proactive. Mentorship is preventative. Mentorship is an investment in the future. New leaders in the Army should seek out and ask for mentorship while leaders who have served past their initial obligation should be thinking (if they aren't already) about how they mentor others. These vital relationships transcend organizations and ensure a continuity of lessons learned—often learned the hard way. The most important aspect of mentorship is that it arises from a relationship based on trust. GEN (R) Carter Ham recently wrote an article titled, ['After Fort Hood, The U.S. Army Will Succeed or Fail on Trust'](#). Mentorship, an active investment in someone's career that will likely continue far past yours, is an important way to foster trust across the ranks.

Ok, one last time, imagine this same storm. We've 'ridden it out' as best we could on the 'Leader-ship'. The 'Mentor-ship' has broken through the waves and saved those aboard from the icy cold, treacherous waters below. Now imagine there are airplanes and helicopters flying overhead. Where did they take off from? The 'Steward-Ship', of course. The 'Steward-ship' is an aircraft carrier; a floating city, a complex system of systems with sick bays, supply stores, and teams of skilled professionals who can talk to the crews of the 'Leader-ship' and 'Mentor-ship' about improving their systems to better weather the next "big one." Stewardship is also a form of leadership that should be considered separately. Stewardship is effectively the culmination of selfless service. It's doing something now the folks after you will get credit for. It's speaking candidly, even when you know your opinion may be

unpopular with the rest of the team. Stewardship is a focus on the organization and its future, beyond individuals and beyond the 'here and now.' Leaders come and go, but the guidon remains. No one owns a unit; they are merely the caretakers of it. This simple truth drives good organizational stewards. What does the guidon symbolize now? What will it mean to Soldiers years after I am gone? These are the kinds of questions that stewards ask of themselves, and others.

Someone might read this and view the differences between leadership, mentorship, and stewardship as mere semantics. However, leaders solve problems and provide purpose, direction, and motivation. Mentors mold problem-solvers and can serve as a career coach of sorts. Stewards prevent future problems from occurring by nurturing the profession. Leadership is always the answer but there is more to that answer than, "Do it more. Do it better." Leaders can and should evolve. Leaders should strive to become mentors. Mentors should endeavor to become stewards. The Army needs all three 'ships' to succeed in the future.

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