



By Assad Raza

Years ago, while attending the XVIII Airborne Corps Pre-Company Command Course, we had several guest speakers who provided different command perspectives. One guest speaker, the Deputy Commander for XVIII Airborne Corp at the time, told the class, “You get what you get!” referring to the fact that you do not get to choose your soldiers, and it’s the command team’s duty to prepare them for combat and develop leaders. However, years later, I realize this statement can also be applied to leaders in regard to their subordinates.

Every leader will have differing experiences based on the organizations in which they are raised, and the organizational leadership to which they’ve been exposed. According to [ADP6-22](#), organizational culture and climate is established by unit leaders. However, not all leaders have the personalities or competencies to create a positive climate, and [politically savvy leaders with toxic tendencies](#) still tend to receive promotions.

Politically savvy toxic leaders often fly under their superiors’ radar. These shrewd operators have the ability to influence their bosses while treating their subordinates aggressively and

making them feel undervalued. This polarity in behavior can have adverse effects on the organization, including frustrating soldiers and empowering subordinate leaders who also have a tendency toward toxic behavior..

It may be challenging to see the true character of your unit leaders early on because they obscure their toxicity with an ability to navigate the nuances of office politics and a mission focus. According to [Klaus J. Templer](#), an associate professor of organizational psychology, “toxic employees whose political skills were highly rated by their supervisors were more likely to have a high-performance rating.” Thus, those who are effective at office politics have a better chance of being promoted into leadership positions. However, [Templer](#) also said that these toxic traits can be useful in an organization.

For example, leaders with low empathy can execute tasks that can be emotionally exhausting for the average person, like removing low performers out of position. Another example [Templer](#) provides is the need for technical specialists who bring unique skills to an organization but may have narcissistic traits or lack social skills. For these reasons, it is fair to say that while not every leader will meet the Army’s leadership requirements, they may still add value to the organization, making it hard to get superiors to take action on what is clearly counter productive leadership.

Those who do live up to the Army Values and have positive characteristics can succeed, as well. Emerging leaders should watch out for organizational politics and be aware that you will encounter [diverse personalities](#) at every turn. To succeed, you must understand you cannot change your leaders, good or bad, but you can adapt your own approach toward your leaders. Moreover, you must strive to become as politically savvy as these toxic leaders, while preserving your integrity and without taking on toxic tendencies.

In closing, there are no guarantees that you will not work in a hyper political environment or for a toxic leader. However, you can succeed by understanding the organizational culture

and climate early on and developing the political acumen to work effectively in any environment. In the long-term, these skills will provide you with a better understanding of the work environment and the [diverse personalities](#) within your unit, providing you the knowledge necessary to achieve success, inside and outside the Army..

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