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Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research

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BOOK REVIEWS

A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

H.G. Rickover

Colonel Paul F. Murphy, US Air Force

Bass, Bernard M., ed. *Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research*, rev. and expanded ed. New York: Free Press, 1981. 856pp. \$39.95

With all due respect to Peters' and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*, in my opinion, this search is more formidable. It started with an offer to pen a short discourse on the unchanging foundations of leadership and ended—almost—with a request from the editor to do an expanded review of Bass's revision of Ralph Stogdill's *Handbook of Leadership*. This review is a diary of that trip through the *leadership jungle*.

To begin the journey I returned in my memory to the Naval Academy. There my classmates and I first learned about leadership. We did not spend much time defining leadership—we were too busy trying to practice it, display it, and get a grade in it. Fortunately, in true Annapolis fashion we knew a way to be leaders. To be a leader one simply had to: "Know your self. Know your stuff. Know your men." Somehow that simple set of phrases was enough to guide us in the right direction. In our own naive way we exercised leadership in accordance with that guidance.

We even justified the entire academy experience in terms of those simple phrases.

Why Plebe year? comearounds? mandatory competitive athletics?

To know your self.

Why YP drills? Knot tying? Reef Points? Steam? Bull?

To know your stuff.

Colonel Murphy is the Vice Commander of the 351st Strategic Missile Wing.

Why Youngster cruise? boiler watches? paint chipping? and Psychology?

To know your men.

Ahh—those were the days. Navy had a football team, Bellino and Staubach won the Heisman Trophy, and Leadership was easy. Little did we or I know it was supposed to be a lot more complex and difficult.

Thank God for behavioral scientists. They “educated” me!

First of all they defined Leaderships. I use the plural because after twenty-five years of study I have learned Leadership means different things to many different people. Stogdill/Bass found the same to be true. They identified a multitude of approaches to defining Leadership. To researchers it is: a focus of group processes, an exercise of influence, an act or behavior, a form of persuasion, a power relationship, an instrument of Goal Achievement, an emerging effect of interaction, a differentiated role, the initiation of structure, and maybe even headship.

After that exercise in precision the authors identified fifty-seven research studies dealing with the types and functions of leadership. The next step was a walk through the thicket of theories and maze of models of leadership during which they cited over 125 studies. My reaction to this point was a mixture of delight and dismay. I was delighted that the researchers seemed not to know any more than I did and dismayed that nowhere had I found a single reference to “Know your self, Know your stuff, Know your men!” Could it be that the academy was wrong? Eagerly I read on searching for an answer.

The discussion of leadership traits and studies went on for forty pages. It included both Stogdill’s original chapter based on his 1948 study, and a pre-seventy follow up that alone cited 163 studies. Hidden amongst the discussion in the words of a behavioral scientist I found the answer to my question. Stogdill/Bass state on page 81 that: “The leader is characterized by a strong drive for responsibility and task completion, vigor and persistence in pursuit of goals, venturesomeness and originality in problem solving, drive to exercise initiative in social situations, self-confidence and sense of personal identity, willingness to accept consequences of decision and action, readiness to absorb interpersonal stress, willingness to tolerate frustration and delay, ability to influence other persons’ behavior, and capacity to structure social interaction systems to the purpose at hand.” Somehow it seemed like the hard way to say *Know your self, Know your stuff, Know your men*. However, it meant the same thing to me. My next question was “If it all boils down to what we learned more than twenty years ago, why bother?”

The answer to that question is clear, and the reason Stogdill/Bass is worth reading. No one who might hope to teach or learn about leadership could or should ignore the vast amount of research material available in the field.

Know your self is a simple phrase. However, knowing your self is not a simple task. What kind of person are you? What kind of leadership style fits you. Are you an extrovert or an introvert? Are you tall or short? Fat or skinny?

Hard or soft? How much integrity do you have? How aggressive/passive are you? These questions and many similar to them must be answered before you can really "Know your self."

Knowing your stuff turns out to be just as difficult. According to a number of studies, "stuff" has a lot of meanings. It includes technical competence, the "nitty gritty," as it were, of the job. Smart shiphandling, sound tactics, and simple competence are examples cited in various studies. In a less specific sense "stuff" includes problem-solving techniques and organizational "smarts," the ability to get results within and through the bureaucracy. Not too surprisingly, communicative skills are also identified in numerous research studies as an important part of "stuff." Rather interesting to me from the viewpoint of a veteran of the Pentagon and other headquarters were the studies which showed that not only the quality but also the quantity of one's talking was positively related to leadership. It would appear that "getting there firstest with the mostest" applies to staff meetings as well as combat. In summary, Stogdill/Bass provides a great deal of support for the applicability of "Know your stuff."

With the validation of "Know your self" and "Know your stuff" by a host of researchers I felt sure "Know your men" had to be supported as well. It was to a degree. The weight of evidence clearly falls on the side of a positive relation between leadership and empathy. Throughout the literature are found phrases such as leaders must be able to:

- know what followers want,
- understand the various motives,
- be insightful,
- be sensitive, and
- estimate group opinion.

However, as Stogdill/Bass point out there are enough contradictory findings in the literature to make one question the assumed positive relationship between empathy and leadership. Fortunately, for the adherents of "Know your men" the contradictions seem to be more a function of research methodology than the underlying relationship. Interestingly, strong support for "Know your men" came from studies that showed leaders had a more accurate picture of what subordinates thought of them than did nonleaders. Other studies showed that successful leaders did such things as checking on the behavior of their men more often than unsuccessful leaders. Also supportive of "Know your men" were the findings that mutual esteem and leadership effectiveness were related. As a whole the literature provides an endorsement to the belief that to be a leader you must "Know your men."

Finally the academy approach was vindicated! "Know your self, Know your stuff, Know your men" was not only a catchy set of phrases but an encapsulation of a multitude of leadership studies. In light of this, one

would hope the services, who more than any other institutions, have a stake in the quality of leadership, are still following the approach. This is particularly important if as some have written the state of military leadership is poor.

Writing in the *Washington Magazine*, Koty, Nathan, and Donohoe asked "Where Have All the Warriors Gone?" In the article is a perfunctory nod to the existence of *some* outstanding leaders in today's military; however, the bulk of the piece deals with the problems of military leadership. The authors cite: a promotion system that frequently does not reward the most promising officers; the loss of too many good officers under the "up or out" promotion system; a system that places too much emphasis on details of management and bureaucracy; officers driven more by personal ambition than by service to nation, mission, and thus our troops; a highly political system of military procurement that poisons the well of leadership. The authors ask ". . . have the classical values of military leadership-honor (Know your self), technical competence (Know your stuff), concern for one's troops, the ability to motivate soldiers (Know your men)—been eroded by a system that emphasizes less worthy items?"

If the state of military leadership is as bad as implied, the prospects for the future are indeed grim. Without an effective military there can be no real freedom and without effective leadership there can be no effective military. But before formulating a plan to *fix* military leadership, it would be wise to determine if it is really *broke*. In my opinion, the state of military leadership is not portrayed accurately by the article in *The Washington*.

The supposed weight of "evidence" cited by the authors clearly makes their case. However, the article itself includes examples that could be used just as well to argue against their indictment of contemporary leadership and much of their evidence is suspect. For example, there will always be some inequities in a promotion system that contains a human element. Some officers who should or could wear stars will never reach them. Some selectees will quite frankly "luck out" by being in the right job at the right time. However, the system, imperfect as it is, does a pretty good job. Otherwise, how would the so-called reformers identified by the authors ever get to positions they hold and make the improvements cited in the article. The people named in the article such as: the Admiral who was a 2AM visitor to the bake shop of the Kennedy (Know your men?); General "Shy" Meyer the Chief of Staff who pushed to improve the system, the Navy's Unrestricted Line Officer career pattern (Know your stuff?); the unnamed thousands of officers who everyday take the unpopular position and defend it in the Pentagon staff meetings (Know your self?), are signs to me that the system is working.

There will always be some officers not selected for promotion to general officer. The majority of them will be extremely well qualified otherwise they would not be competing. The selection board does not pick "winners" and

"losers." It tries, and I think usually succeeds, to pick the very best from a group of "winners." By the time an officer is a captain or colonel competing for flag rank, he or she has been a leader, made tough management decisions, demonstrated integrity and earned a measure of respect based on those achievements. Those officers were winners in a very tough, but fair competition to reach the rank they hold. It is not surprising that when not selected for stars some of these winners leave the service. It would be a surprise if they stayed. Few senior officers serve past retirement eligibility for the money. Many, especially the winners, stay on in hope that they can rise to even more senior positions and greater challenge. With that hope lessened by a nonselection to flag rank, some, probably most of the winners leave. Therefore, it is not too difficult to find many examples of outstanding officers, leaders in every sense of the word, who have retired. To use these people as evidence that the system does not value or reward leadership makes little sense. First, there is no evidence that the officers selected for flag rank were any less able leaders than those not picked. Second, if the system does not value leadership, how did the individual ever get to be a colonel or captain? In truth an O-6 has been selected for advancement by at least five promotion boards during his or her career. It would appear that the much maligned system does work.

To the authors of *Where Have All the Warriors Gone?* I would answer "Look around, they are still here!" To those warriors I would say "If you can only read one book on leadership, make it the revised and expanded *Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership*." It is the finest handy reference for students, teachers, and practitioners of leadership available today. In its many pages are the data that makes it a little easier to understand why you must: Know your self! Know your stuff! Know your men!

Stockdale, Jim and Sybil. *In Love and War*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984. 472pp. \$18.95

Stockdale, James B. *A Vietnam Experience. Ten Years of Reflection*. Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1984. 147pp. \$19.95, paper \$9.95

"The important thing is not what

with what they've done to you," said philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre to Fr. Marius Perrin while both were prisoners of war in a German camp in Trier after the fall of France in 1940. What was done to POW Sartre was nothing compared to what "they" did to Navy fighter pilot Jim Stockdale, shot down over North Vietnam in 1965 and held captive in Hanoi with other US fliers for more