

# Core Leadership Traits Found

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Several weeks ago, Defense Contract Management Agency Director Charlie Williams, Jr. posed a challenge to the agency's senior leadership. He asked that each of us prepare an article for *Communicator* concerning our views on "leadership." Specifically, he tasked each of us with answering the question, "What are the core traits of leadership?"

Aeronautical Systems Division Director Marie Greening broke the ice on this challenge in the spring *Communicator* with the article, "A New 'Core' Focus in a New Year." I was tempted to simply write that I agree completely with what she wrote on the matter and call it good. Instead, I will say that I completely agree with what director Greening said concerning leadership but will offer some additional points or ideas that complement her effort.

So, what *are* the core traits of leadership?

Having worked with each military service and various Department of Defense agencies for a number of years, I have noticed a common thread among them — a set of core values. Each service does a great job communicating to its members these values and how the values contribute to its goals and mission accomplishment. Although the values are communicated somewhat differently from service to service, I have observed three key words common to each service's core values: *integrity*, *service* and *excellence*. I believe these three words are also key core traits that every leader, civilian or military, must possess to be considered great.

### ***Integrity***

Integrity means doing the right thing at the right time and place,



DCMA International Command Capt. David Graff believes that integrity, service and excellence are key core traits that every leader must possess to be considered "great."

doing it consistently and doing it when no one is looking. This first trait is fidelity to high moral standards and principles. Integrity derives from the word integral, which means whole or not fractional. In other words, integrity should encompass one's entire being down to the core — this is where character begins. Integrity is a character trait that remains "first among equals."

No matter what your profession, integrity is crucial to maintaining

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— Capt. David Graff

# Within Services' Core Values

the confidence of those you serve and those you serve with.

In our work it is imperative that each team member possess integrity, not just our leaders. This is a trait that each agency employee must embrace from his or her first day on the job to his or her final day here. It is my experience that once embraced, integrity stays with one both on and off the job, as well as after one leaves government service. As employees embrace this trait and continue to learn and grow within the agency, leadership becomes a natural step in one's career progression. If an employee maintains integrity in all he or she does, the uprightness and soundness of his or her leadership will be above reproach.

Occasionally we work with people within the contract management community who lack the personal and professional integrity needed to perform their duties. Unfortunately, such individuals damage DCMA's credibility and tarnish the agency's reputation. I admonish everyone to, as our director often says, "Get on the bus!" Being truthful and honest in each and every decision you make,

from day one, means integrity infuses every action or process you influence as a leader.

## *Service*

I often remind the folks in the International Division that, regardless of your position within the organizational structure, I

expect one goal to be accomplished — do everything we can to support and serve the military men and women of this country.

Recently, DCMA's senior leadership looked at the agency's mission statement to ensure it aligned with the agency's vision for the future.



(Image courtesy of iStockphoto)



Capt. David Graff, center, with DCMA Director Charlie Williams, Jr. in Iraq. (DCMA staff photo)

After hours of thought and careful consideration of each word in the statement, we agreed on the following as the agency's new mission statement: *We provide contract administration services to the Department of Defense acquisition enterprise and its partners to ensure delivery of quality products and services to the warfighter; on time and on cost.* We've all heard the saying, "You must stand for something, or

you'll fall for anything." But what does that really mean? Standing firm when it comes to DCMA's policies and procedures is all well and good, but it does not speak to having a vision. As a leader, you must learn to communicate your vision and the agency's vision to the people you want to follow you. But how can you do that? By doing the following:

- Learn to paint a picture with words. Speak it, write it, draw

it, touch it. Whatever methods you can use to create a picture, do it. After all, "a picture is worth a thousand words."

- Ask each of the other managers in DCMA to tell you, in his or her own words, about the agency's vision. How close are their words to what you thought they understood as the vision? Is your team on the same page as you?

As you work, DCMA's vision should be in your mind everyday, and you should occasionally reevaluate the vision so that it stays current with the changing times. Remember, your staff needs to be just as engaged as you in keeping it up to date if you truly want them to buy into the vision. Be sure to

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keep your key players involved. Great leaders understand how to do these things while mentoring and guiding subordinates toward performing the agency's mission and, in turn, serving the warfighter.

### Excellence

The director has reminded the agency many times that "good is the enemy of great." With this in mind, he is asking that all of us set our navigational compasses toward making the agency great.

Leaders do not command excellence; they build excellence. Excellence is "be[ing] all you can be" within the bounds of doing what is right for the organization. To reach excellence you must first be a leader of good character. You must do everything you are supposed to do. Organizations will not achieve excellence by figuring out where it wants to go, thus having leaders striving aimlessly to get the job done and hope each member acts with good character — this type of thinking is backward.

Pursuing excellence should not be confused with accomplishing a job or task. When you are planning, you do it by backward planning. But you do not achieve excellence by backward planning. Excellence starts with leaders of good, strong character who engage in the entire process of leadership — and the first process is being a person of honorable character.

A great leader also understands that getting people to strive toward greatness is never a "one-size-fits-all" approach. What motivates one

employee toward greatness is not necessarily what motivates another. It is important to understand that if agency leadership, at all levels, is going to help influence and guide those within the organization toward becoming great, then the agency must adapt its motivational approach to best fit the individual.

Great leaders are *made*, not born. If you have the desire and will power, you can become an effective leader. Great leaders develop through a never-ending process of self study, education, training and experience.

To inspire your teammates and subordinates to higher levels of teamwork, there are certain things you must *be, know* and *do*. These do not come naturally but are acquired through continuous work and study. We can learn something from almost anyone by observing either how to do something or how not to do something ... even from watching television.

I read a book entitled *All I Really Need to Know I Learned from Watching Star Trek*. In it, the author, Dave Marinaccio, discusses how Star Trek's primary character, Capt. James T. Kirk, was an excellent leader and manager because the viewer always knew who was in charge. After watching the show again, I recognized that Marinaccio's observation is true. When he was

on screen, Capt. Kirk was in charge. When he was not on screen, there were no questions about who was in charge, because Capt. Kirk always designated an alternate leader. Straightforward, simple and direct instructions eliminated any doubt, confusion or miscommunication for the members of his team.

This takes me into my closing thought. Great leaders always challenge themselves to grow and learn something new to expand the available tools in their leadership toolbox. They are the type of people who do not rest on their laurels. When we lose this edge and desire to learn, it is time for us to step aside and make room for those we have trained and mentored to take our places. Because, as leaders, succession planning is one of the key elements of an effective, high-performance organization that has made the leap from "good to great." 

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### DCMA's Core Values

- Service
- Integrity
- Excellence