



Business and Public Policy Round Table

April 3, 2013

University Club of St. Paul

“Perspectives on Leadership from the U.S. Army War College”

Chair: Steve Young, Global Executive Director, Caux Round Table

Special Guest Speaker: Professor Craig Bullis, U.S. Army War College

Participants: Ken Beale; Barb Bergseth; John Buttner; Roger Conant; John Hinck; Michael LaBrosse; Colleen Landkamer; Bob MacGregor; Scott McLellan; Ron Okenfuss; Verna Price; Tom Prichard; Dick Primuth; Maureen Reed; Mark Ritchie; Don Samuels; Joyce Swenson; Deborah Yungner; Al Zdrazil

Staff: Jessica Fiala; Jed Ipsen

Professor Craig Bullis of the U.S. Army War College introduced the discussion with a definition of what he teaches at the War College: strategic leadership. He made a distinction between the leadership challenges of tactical, short-term specific mission accomplishment and the tensions and complexities which are the challenges at higher command positions. These challenges result from the management of both internal systems and powerful external stakeholders. Mission focus at this higher level has more scope and longer-term impact than taking care of more tactically-focused problems. Interpersonal relationships and interaction are critical for effectiveness. At the strategic level, what is decided upon for the short-term must also be best for the long-term.

The instructional approach taken at the US Army War College for enhancement of strategic leadership skills is a seminar based model built around a cohort of students. Peers become an educational resource. Professional instructors provide challenge, assessment, and support. They comment on the standards and the contexts in which decisions are to be considered and made. Performance flows from motivation, ability and the climate of the organization – the culture of the decision-making process.

The students of strategic leadership must get beyond conventions. The grounds for any decision is preparing to face tensions to be resolved by what is right, fair and true. Positions demanding strategic leadership prove to be lonely for their occupants, who need trusted confidants as well as a solid understanding of themselves and their own motivators. Power may be derived from rank, position, or personal capabilities. The first two are associated with their role as commissioned

officers, whereas the latter is personally earned – and personal capabilities is the most effective in terms of leadership. Therefore, there needs to be a good “fit” between individual and position requirements. Misalignment between one’s demeanor or personal strengths and a particular position taps energy on a daily basis. Pursuing an appropriate position for one’s strengths is part of the process; leveraging or protecting against one’s weaknesses is the other necessary component for successful leadership.

When stress arises, where do you go for resolution and guidance? These positions go beyond normal comfort zones, requiring energy and work that can be exhausting. Consequently, senior leaders must deliberately attend to their physical and mental well-being. One also needs to be visionary and see a different future. This is where creativity and conceptual vigor comes into play.

Strategy means thinking about today in the context of a desired future. In other words, senior leaders must begin with an understanding of the future environment, determine how organizations can survive and excel in that environment, then take actions today that move the organization towards that future state. How do we take the correct steps to be in the right place in the future?

There is concern is that the military and society are moving apart. The grounds for power and influence differ in the two spheres. How does accumulation of personal respect occur? What human interactions with others lead to influence? Why do some allow themselves to be influenced? At a broad level, though, leadership is similar in both military and civilian context: effective leadership follows from having a positive impact on others.

In the military, respect flows from rank, which is earned through service, position and personal relationships. The culture is one where the individual subordinates his or her will to the Nation and higher-level commanders. In some respects, then, military leadership is easier as missions and authorities are generally clear. In politics, things are much less clear.

Our society has blurred the distinction between politicians and statesmen. The scope of vision for the common good has shrunk, as politics has overtaken statecraft.

The hardest environment for leadership is that of non-profits, which rely on volunteers. There, power flows from the attractive force of mission, agenda and personalities. There is little positional power over volunteers, so aligning subordinate (volunteer) and organizational missions is critical to retain the volunteers and, eventually, accomplish the organizational tasks.

The size of the ego can eclipse the size of the mission, which can lead to trouble.

Many of the challenges of strategic leadership are cognitive, with a wider scope of understanding needed than at the tactical level of operations.

Much of essential, leadership ability is learned in the family – the confidence of the kids that they can be leaders – that they can make a positive difference in the lives of others. The state of the family is a key variable.