



CURRENT LEADERSHIP PROFILE IN SRI LANKA ARMY

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a complex term, and in the Sri Lanka Army it has been defined in terms of three broad categories of personnel. Officers from the rank of Captain down to Second Lieutenant and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) are considered to be junior leaders, Majors and Lieutenant are Colonels middle level leaders, and Colonels and above are senior level leaders.

Effectiveness of any army depends upon the quality of leadership. Soldiers need to be controlled and directed in the right path at various levels during both peace and war. Therefore, the leaders need adequate training in their respective capacities. In Sri Lanka the basic military leadership training is imparted to young officers at the Sri Lanka Military Academy and General Sir John Kotelawela Defence Academy. Thereafter they receive the initial scope for applying leadership skills during regimentation periods after joining a unit.

With the passage of time these young officers discover a different command and leadership environment in their units. Most of the senior officers in the unit remain committed and career-cautious. Therefore, they do not have time to give necessary guidance and assistance to the junior officers for developing their leadership qualities. Commanding Officers and Brigade Commanders are not ready to accept their subordinates' simple and genuine mistakes and forgive them for the same while performing duties in their units. As a result young officers develop some fear of making mistakes and stop independent and creative thinking with regard to something new. As a result our army is losing its dynamic nature of leadership where the military leaders fail to fulfil the modern battlefield demand for grasping the complex situations and reacting to them swiftly.

LEADERS OF SRI LANKA ARMY

Junior Leaders: Officers from the rank of Captain down to Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) are considered to be junior leaders in the Sri Lanka Army. Junior leaders are the main fighting element and the success of a well-conceived plan depends upon its effective execution by them. They execute policies, supervise activities, and brief the immediate senior officers in the performance, direction, motivation, and organizational sustainment functions. They also directly ensure discipline among the soldiers. Unfortunately the standard of a junior leadership of a battle-tested army like ours has not been able to reach the desired standard as yet. The basic military knowledge and the elementary knowledge of leadership skills are imparted to the potential military officers at the Sri Lanka Military Academy and at General Sir John Kotelawela Defence Academy and to the soldiers in the Recruit Training Centers. Young officers join the unit with the authority to command soldiers placed under them. Hence, they receive guidance and assistance from Senior Officers and the Commanding Officer who hold the responsibilities of developing leadership qualities in them, while the young soldiers remain inexperienced in this aspect as they have to wait for a long time to assume the responsibilities of commanding a body of troops and developing the art of leadership.

Middle Level Leaders: Officers of the rank of Major and Lieutenant Colonel are considered to be middle level leaders in the Sri Lanka Army. Besides directly leading the units and sub-units, they act as important value setters. They also make short-term policies, set short-term goals and execute short-range tactical schemes. While a Lieutenant Colonel performs duties of the Battalion Commander, a Major is normally appointed as a Company Commander and his initial leadership starts from this appointment

Commanding of troops is the most responsible and satisfying aspect of soldiering. Yet, today, about 50% of the total population of Majors and Lieutenant Colonels usually prefer to



serve as instructors or staff officers in the formation or Army Headquarters because these appointments are more prestigious than serving in units. At this level of leadership a Commanding Officer can play a vital role. He could devise means to project his character and personality to create a positive impression on the individuals and in the sub units under his command.

Senior Leaders: The senior-level leadership at formation level ranges from the Brigade Commander to General. The Brigade Commander and General Officer Commanding mostly practice indirect leadership. They make long term policies and goals for the organization. They shape the command climate and execute complex tactical problems. A senior leader seldom leaves scope for experiment to be made or risks to be taken by the unit or sub-unit commanders. This is detrimental to the growth of an officer's leadership traits like initiative and moral courage. In such an environment any one who takes an initiative, does so at the risk of his career. It is more desirable and practical for the present day military leaders at senior level to practice a more dynamic, strategic, and conceptual leadership than a traditional one.

FACTORS AFFECTING CURRENT LEADERSHIP ENVIRONMENT

Social Background: Soldiers and officers walk into the Army from different socio-economic backgrounds. Most of the officers and servicemen join the army to earn their livelihood. The Army career is not taken as "Serve to Lead." Our social and cultural heritage is not rich with military leadership dedications. Leadership qualities are mostly pursued in our army to fulfill the job requirement rather than being devoted to the profession. There are many socio-economic factors due to which our officers are not adequately inspired to be completely devoted to their profession or to be good military leaders. One essential quality of military leadership is the ability to undergo hardships, a quality, which is lacking in most of the young educated lots in our country.

Lack of Initiative: The tendency on the part of senior commanders to interfere with the activities of their subordinates at the lower formations or unit level is becoming widespread, as many senior commanders are reluctant to take any chance because they fear that the failure of their subordinates will reflect badly on them. The leaders are not ready to accept risky options that can sometimes produce the greatest success, whether in training during peacetime or in planning for operational tasks. There could be many reasons behind this risk aversion attitude. First of all an officer's grooming from the day he joined his unit as a Second Lieutenant to his promotion to a Lieutenant Colonel, he may never have been encouraged to take independent decisions or to use his initiative in introducing anything new in the working or training of his outfit. This fact along with the careerism of the seniors and some other factors, which need research ultimately, curb the initiative of the junior leaders.

Lack of Reliance over Subordinate Commanders: In the Sri Lanka Army some of the senior leaders do not generally take any mishap or mistake as a part of military life. Their attitude at times forces the subordinate leaders to adopt the approach of no risk, no trouble, and maximum chance of career opportunity. In our military environment over-supervision is also a common phenomenon, which affects the creativity of the junior officers on the one hand and which causes a lack of genuine respect for the seniors on the other.

Relationship between Senior and Junior Officers: Senior officers must be accessible and they should not be dreaded. Unfortunately in our army, a pronounced gap exists between senior and junior leaders. A young officer can not approach a divisional commander directly. Sometimes he feels shy to get closer to his senior officers perhaps due to fear of being checked. On the contrary, senior officers communicate, even in the command channel, through staffs and make rare effort to create a friendly and congenial atmosphere to attract the young leaders. This lack of rapport



between the senior and junior officers ultimately results in low morale, lack of motivation, aimless training, wastage of efforts, and breach of confidence and fellow feeling.

Lack of Professional Competence: It is a treasured saying that man's fight through life is sustained by the power of knowledge. Again it is a well-known maxim that an ignorant military officer is no less than a murderer. A professionally competent officer can only nurture the military values and ethics. Presently, many soldiers view the service as a job, the military as an occupation, and motivation and performance criteria mostly from the standpoint of material reward. It implies that the soldiers take the profession as a means of life and not as a way of life. There is a sharp decline in quality among officers too. One of the distinct qualities of professionalism is to look after the interests of the nation first, then to be loyal to seniors and lastly to look for self-interest. But our officers are turning towards being better careerists than professionals. They often like trying to manage their career by themselves. This attitude undermines the value of professionalism. The platoon and company commanders at times are not provided with an environment, which they can capitalize and train themselves for combat leadership. Thus, there is a need to create an atmosphere of professionalism in a unit.

A Leader's Responsibility: Self-development programs can be easily tailored to meet changes in the environment and the unique status of unit missions, as well as an individual's developmental needs and professional interests. The concept of self-development places responsibility squarely on the leader to perform his responsibilities to attain professional competency. Leaders should be responsible for their own professional development and they should not depend on his Commanding Officer, Commander or any other superior leader. Self-development is an essential part of every officer's leadership development, if he is to reach an expected level of leadership.

Academic Training: The Sri Lanka Military Academy and the Kotelawala Defence Academy are the two major institutes where potential leaders are cast into a mould of combat soldiers and young military leaders. The training system currently operating in these two institutions does not seem to allow the development of the personality growth of the trainees. The free flow of ideas, views, and opinions of these young cadets is curbed right at the beginning of their military careers by the senior cadets, officer instructors, and NCO instructors who do not have an adequate knowledge of the psychological requirements and the environment of the young cadets. The end result is an officer whose personality development has been drastically affected. They may be doing so with the good intention of producing sturdy military personnel. However, it is high time that we question the validity of the strategies adopted in this advanced era where mental and intellectual fitness play a bigger role in the military affairs in the world.

CONCLUSION

The three officer categories range from the junior level of NCO to Major, the mid-level from Major to Lieutenant Colonel, and the senior level from Lieutenant Colonel to Major General. The initial command of a platoon in the rank of a second lieutenant, lieutenant, or captain is the first step in an officer's army career. It is the first command after one's training at the Military Academy. An officer at this level is exposed to the senior officers and to the men within his unit. The Company/Commanding Officer is the role model for such an officer. Ideally such an officer serves a few years as platoon commander, signals officer, assistant adjutant/adjutant, messing officer/sports officer and in other regimental duties. But this does not happen today. It has become the usual practice to maneuver for staff appointments or to best serve as an ADC to a senior officer. By doing so, an officer misses the vital experience he would never get ever again. Consequently the officer is lost to the establishment system. This may ultimately stand between victory and defeat.



Generally young officers that are well placed are posted into instructional institutions which do not provide opportunities for them to gain field experience. There is a wide gap between seniors and juniors and the result is an absence of interaction. Officers learn to be cautious to gain promotions, courses abroad, and useful appointments. Little or no emphasis is given to the sphere of command. Soon the organization will be inefficient for different reasons and will continue but only temporarily resulting in a command breakdown crisis. The SLA has a moderate profile in this aspect.

The term institutional training refers to both formal and informal instructional training here and abroad. Effective instructional training is the foundation for an effective officer. Unit and sub unit commanders also play a role in this training. The cumulative development of an officer is the result of military schooling, operational assignments, and self-development.

Officers and NCOs are challenged to achieve training excellence and operational assignments give them a good opportunity in this regard. At higher levels senior commanders should provide the guidance required for officer development. Senior officers must encourage and not discourage, disrespect, ridicule, or punish those who have different viewpoints. They should instead listen to the ideas, views, and opinions of their juniors as the experience gained by them in the field may be vital in the decision making process. Junior officers fight the battle where it is most required. They listen and lead. Thus it is evident that basic training is provided at the lower levels of command. The Northeast part of the country provides ample opportunities for gaining this vital experience.

A lifelong commitment for self-development should prepare the junior officer to reach higher and effective levels of command with confidence. Staff appointments alone will lead to failure as was the case of General Percival in Singapore in the World War II.

To summarize, I like to note how Sir Charles Portal COS of the RAF recalled his tirade with Winston Churchill during World War II. When he disagreed forcibly and said "sorry", Sir Winston had replied, "You know in war you don't have to be nice, you only have to be right" and "War is a constant struggle and must be waged from day to day."

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A unit commander should be a competent and professional Lieutenant Colonel. Therefore, selected officers of the rank of Lieutenant Colonel should be given the responsibility of commanding units.
2. A Commanding Officer should remain in his unit for a minimum Period of three years.
3. In appointing instructors, in addition to the performances in their courses and cadres, their potential to be instructors should be considered as a criterion, as there can be officers who may not have excelled in their training yet they may possess better capabilities in functioning as instructors. This will also give them an opportunity for self-improvement, as they will be in touch with relatively good officers. This will eventually enhance the overall efficiency of the Army.
4. Officers having better grading in courses should not be confined to instructional and staff jobs. They should also be allowed to serve in the field units to get the requisite experience of serving with troops.
5. A separate institution is to be established to conduct leadership development programs for officers of various levels, where the leaders might be tested by and jeeting them in different complex situations.



6. Formation Commanders down to Unit or Battalion Commanders must create an environment in their units or battalions where they will delegate authority to their subordinate leaders so as to ensure that they take initiatives within the authority delegated to them.
7. The instructors in military academies must be educated in the modern nuances in training young men and women for leadership roles so that their leadership qualities and capacity for creative and innovative thinking are enhanced.

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