



**The Art of Command: Military Leadership from George Washington to Colin Powell**  
 Edited by Harry S. Laver and Jeffrey J. Matthews  
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Trait-based leadership studies go in and out of vogue. These studies focus on a characteristic a leader possesses that the author of a study believes is a particularly desirable quality that should be examined and possibly emulated. Professional military schools find this technique useful for teaching leadership to officers and non-commissioned officers, and thus most military leaders have gone through volumes of these studies during their education. Unfortunately, many senior leaders shy away from such works, feeling they present leaders through a myopic lens that can distort individuals' broader traits and obscure the richer array of techniques they employed that have contributed to their success.

Considering the potential limitations of trait-based leadership analysis, one may wonder if *The Art of Command*, which

employs this technique, is really worth reading. The answer is a resounding *yes*. The authors of each chapter of this edited work not only bring out the leadership trait they have been charged to highlight, but also put the leader into a rich historical context. What results is a very satisfying read.

The compendium takes the reader through nine traits that the editors believe are some of the most important. Three studies that stand out above the others are Kerry Irish's cross-cultural leadership study of General Dwight D. Eisenhower; Jon Hoffman's study of Lieutenant General Lewis Burwell "Chesty" Puller's charismatic leadership; and Jeffrey Matthews's illustration of exemplary followership based on General Colin Powell.

The chapter on Eisenhower is particularly poignant when considered in conjunction with the multinational approach being employed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Irish believes that Eisenhower's unwavering conviction that America's future wars would be fought and won alongside its allies was a leadership trait that set him apart from his peers. To help prepare himself for the future, Eisenhower spent the interwar years studying military and cultural histories to understand potential allies and enemies.

When placed in charge of the European theater in World War II, Eisenhower's historical and cultural understanding of the Allies allowed him to implement his vision of a cross-cultural command that was unified and that included Allies, not just as token advisors, but in a fully integrated command structure. Irish points out that despite strong disagreements within his command on the military utility of the Allied warfare, Eisenhower always found ways to meet his

military objectives while satisfying the alliance partners.

In contrast to Eisenhower's focus on building coalition partnerships, Puller focused his attention on building his internal Marine team. Puller, a larger-than-life hero to Marines, possessed many qualities that can be modeled, but Hoffman keys on Puller's charismatic leadership style. This leadership trait is often written about, but many see it as very difficult to emulate because they believe charismatic leadership is something one possesses at a very early age. Hoffman shows that Puller's charisma was something he developed through his valor, his genuine connection with his subordinates, and his lead-from-the-front style. He believes that one does not have to be born with this type of charisma; rather, it can be taught and emulated.

The strength of Puller's personality comes through vividly in Hoffman's essay. Hoffman relates several instances of how Puller used specific leadership skills to develop his version of charismatic leadership. In one example, Puller encountered a Marine who was saluting a lieutenant repeatedly and asked the officer why this was occurring. The lieutenant replied that the private was being taught a lesson for failing to render a salute. Puller told the officer that it was only proper for the lieutenant to return every one of the private's salutes, and he remained to ensure his instructions were carried out correctly. It is unclear if this incident is apocryphal, but the fact that Puller's subordinates believed that it could have happened showed the powerful effect he had on those he commanded.

The final chapter of the book addresses one of the most important aspects of effective leadership, namely the role of good followership. The editors note in their introduction that

"too often, followership evokes a negative connotation. . . . To the contrary, the best and most effective followers share many characteristics with successful leaders." To illustrate followership, an unlikely candidate, Colin Powell, is showcased.

Though Powell is a role model of an exceptionally gifted leader, Jeff Matthews shows that Powell's leadership skills were enhanced by his exemplary followership. Tracing Powell's life from being a lieutenant through his meteoric rise to become the Nation's youngest Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Matthews cites numerous examples of Powell's followership that helped him further develop his leadership skills. Even as a new major general, Powell drew upon his followership skills as the Secretary of Defense's military assistant. Matthews notes that the "keys to his success as a follower were his willingness to assume responsibility, take the initiative, and work tactfully alongside other[s]." Powell himself noted that "leadership is all about followership."

Overall, *The Art of Command* is an exceptional book. It can be read by leaders at all levels to learn more about some of the key traits they can try to cultivate within themselves. For senior leaders, the book offers many new ways of looking at prominent leaders, perspectives that are not often covered in even the larger biographies. Laver and Matthews have put together a thoughtful and inspirational book that should be part of the permanent collection of all leaders. **JFQ**

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