

FROM THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, DR. ROBERT GATES, IN HIS SPEECH TO THE 2007 GRADUATING CLASS OF THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY ON FRIDAY, MAY 25<sup>TH</sup> 2007

To be a leader at any level, from president to junior officer, I believe the following qualities are required:

**Vision.** If you would be a real leader, you must see beyond the day-to-day tasks and challenges. You must look beyond tomorrow and discern a world of possibilities and potential. You must see what others do not or cannot and then be prepared to act on your vision.

Another quality is **integrity**. Without this, real leadership is not possible. Nowadays, it seems like integrity – or honor or character – is kind of quaint, a curious, old-fashioned notion.

But there are many, many people for whom personal integrity and honor are as important as life itself. I have encountered many such people during my forty years in public service – and you will encounter many during your careers.

For a real leader, **personal virtues – self-reliance, self-control, honor, truthfulness, morality** – are absolute. These are the building blocks of character, of integrity – and only on that foundation can true leadership be built.

An additional quality necessary for leadership is **deep conviction**. True leadership is a fire in the mind that transforms all who feel its warmth, that transfuses all who see its shining light in the eyes of a man or woman. It is a strength of purpose and belief in a cause that reaches out to others, touches their hearts, and makes them eager to follow.

**Self-confidence** is still another quality of leadership. Not the chest-thumping, strutting egotism we see and read about all the time. Rather, it is the quiet self-assurance that allows a leader to give others both real responsibility and real credit for success. The ability to stand in the shadow and let others receive attention and accolades. A leader is able to make decisions but then delegate and trust others to make things happen.

This doesn't mean turning your back after making a decision and hoping for the best. It does mean trusting people at the same time you have a regular reporting mechanism, and are holding them accountable. The bottom line: a self-confident leader doesn't cast such a large shadow that no one else can grow.

A further quality of leadership is **courage**: the courage to chart a new course; the courage to do what is right and not just what is popular; the courage to stand alone; the courage to act; the courage as a military officer to "speak truth to power."

In most academic curricula today, and in most business, government, and military training programs, there is great emphasis on team-building, on working together, on building consensus, on group dynamics. You have heard a lot about that. But, for everyone who would become a leader, the time comes when he or she must stand alone and say, "This

is wrong” or “I disagree with all of you and, because I have the responsibility, this is what we will do.” Don’t kid yourself – that takes courage.

**Vision, integrity, deep conviction, and self-confidence are not enough to make a leader; a leader must have the courage to act, often against the will of the crowd.** As President Ford once said, “... the greatest defeat of all would be to live without courage, for that would hardly be living at all.”

A final quality of real leadership, I believe, is simply **common decency**: treating those around you – and, above all, your subordinates – with fairness and respect. An acid test of leadership is how you treat those you outrank.

A real leader, in my experience, from the lowest rung of the ladder to the top, treats every person with respect and dignity.

Use your authority over others for constructive purposes, to help them – to watch out and care for them, to help them improve their skills and to advance, to ease their hardships whenever possible. All of this can be done without compromising discipline or mission or authority.

Common decency builds respect and, in a democratic society, respect is what prompts people to give their all for a leader, even at personal sacrifice.

In a novel about ancient Greece, the warrior Alcibiades is asked how to lead free men, and he responds: “By being better and thus commanding their emulation.” Alcibiades goes on, “A commander’s role is to model ... excellence before his men. One need not thrash them to greatness, only hold it out before them. They will be compelled by their own nature to emulate it.” He concludes: “How [to] lead free men? Only by this means: the summoning of each to his nobility.”