

Scholarship in Practice

Leadership in action

by Capt William D. Steeves, Jr., USMC(Ret)

The work of scholars who are leaders in their discipline is like that of leaders who are scholars in their professions. Neither work is passive. Each is dynamic, rigorous, demanding, and challenging, and each entails human elements and competencies. Author Joseph C. Rost analyzed 587 works on leadership written between 1900 and 1990 and found 221 definitions for it.¹ I doubt that any of these definitions, or others since, including military leadership principles, describe the important link between scholar and leader. This symbiotic relationship was suggested by Gregory Nazianzen circa 362 AD. His description of leadership—not a definition—identified the human and practical components that tie leadership and scholarship’s complexities together.

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He said, “For the guiding of man, the most variable and manifold of creatures, seems to me in very deed to be the art of arts and science of sciences.”²

Nazianzen’s description of leadership reflected scholarship in highlighting its human complexities, or the idea that man is “variable and manifold” in character. Like leadership, scholarship is a human endeavor subject to a range of thought processes and behaviors. Also relevant was Nazianzen’s observation that leadership in practice was highly complex, the “art of arts and

science of sciences.” The same is true of scholarship. Each is demanding, action oriented, and not “by the numbers” in practice. Although stated over one thousand years ago, the idea that these characteristics tie scholarship and leadership together in their interconnected roles remains valid today.

Scholarship as an Approach

Scholarship is alluded to in leadership literature and its principles, but it is not clearly explained in ways that leaders can easily adopt and apply. Scholarship is analysis and continuous learning, etc., but what are its functions and how can it become integral to leadership in practice?

For current and future Marine leaders—NCOs, SNCOs, and commissioned officers alike—making scholarship an active component of leadership training is essential to developing it as a required leadership competency. This is pertinent because scholarship is indispensable to leadership.

Scholarship. The term scholarship is associated with many aspects of academic disciplines, critical thinking, essential study, research, analysis, continuing education, and important readings (as found on the Commandant’s Professional Reading List, for instance) among them. Marines are taught leadership principles like seeking self-improvement, training subordinates as a team, and becoming profession-



Scholarship that is incorporated into leadership responsibilities will enhance leadership professionalism. (Photo by LCpl Salmineo Sherman, Jr.)

ally and technically proficient, which also reflect scholarship. To assist and encourage Marine leaders to understand and use scholarship's operational components, I refer to Dr. Ernest Boyer's 1990 book, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*.³ It provides comprehension that should enable leaders to think of ways to apply and integrate scholarship with their leadership responsibilities. Once understood and practiced, scholarship will enhance a leader's professionalism and improve subordinates' and units' capabilities. Like leadership, scholarship is essential!

Benjamin Franklin allegedly said, "We are all born ignorant, but one must work hard to remain stupid," providing impetus to the importance of scholarship. Ignorance because of one's unwillingness to gain knowledge results in stupidity. Data and information are widely available online, in libraries and through education, so there are no excuses. Practicing scholarship will prevent a leader's ignorance from becoming stupidity.

The functions of scholarship. Although Boyer's thoughts on scholarship focus on academic pursuits, they nevertheless offer ways Marines and other professionals can apply scholarship on the job to become more effective leaders. He identifies four overlapping functions of academic scholarship that provide the knowledge base for its use, and these functions depict the roles of a scholar-leader within academe but also relate to those of the military leader-scholar. They are:

- The scholarship of discovery or research.
- The scholarship of integration or synthesis.
- The scholarship of application or doing.
- The scholarship of teaching or instructing.

These functions should be viewed as interconnected, not as separate elements.

The scholarship of discovery. To Boyer, the scholarship of discovery means research, the commitment to knowledge for its own sake, wherever it may lead, i.e., the truth. Discovery occurs via a rigorous process, the scientific method found in formal research, for instance.



Like leadership, scholarship is essential. (Photo by LCpl Dominique Fisk.)

He writes of the researcher's probing or inquisitive mind as a vital asset to the academy and the world. Alluding to change, he writes that intellectual excitement fueled by the quest for new knowledge in our complicated, vulnerable world is absolutely crucial.

The late management guru, Dr. Peter Drucker, himself a scholar, defined intellectual integrity as being objective, seeing things as they are and not as we want them to be.⁴ The essence of discovery means telling it like it is, regardless of political implications and personal career risk. From an unknown author, "It is not the risk to a critic, it is the risk to an organization or a society if there are no critics." The search for truth, no matter where it may lead, is a fundamental tenet of higher education and should be an objective among military professionals as well.

When conducting research, you must forget egos, preconceived ideas, desired outcomes, and biases. Research means probing in depth available, credible sources, even those that go way back in time; analyzing data and information; and presenting objective results untainted by your own opinions and beliefs. Unfortunately, there is a caveat that could relate to career risk. Accurate research results may run counter to the anticipated or desired outcomes of senior leaders or the researcher. These

outcomes may be considered controversial, not in conformance to current doctrine, politically incorrect, not SOP, or contradictory to a commander's inflexible mindset. Leaders should not let their personal views or beliefs close or narrow what should be their open minds or those of their subordinates.

Discovery stretches the questioning mind leaders should possess and surfaces the depth and breadth of research, study, and analytical abilities needed to derive new and useful knowledge. As in other missions, successful research benefits from teamwork. It is rare that a researcher knows all of the elements of a research subject. Selecting the most appropriate analytical methodology—qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method—often requires added expertise. The researcher, subject-matter expert, professional colleague, research-methods expert, and the ever-wonderful and under-utilized research librarian are excellent team assets.

Research abilities should become part of a leader's professional portfolio that, when applied objectively and enhanced by teamwork, can lead to useful discoveries.

The scholarship of integration. In the scholarship of integration, Boyer's second function, he gives meaning to isolated facts, puts them in perspective, connects them across disciplines, and

illuminates data in revealing ways. This function is interpreting and fitting your own and others' research into the context of larger intellectual patterns. It is interdisciplinary, interpretative, and integrative in scope. Communicating with colleagues in other fields and creating mutual learning are key components to achieving this. In short, this function comprises the investigative and synthesizing aspects of scholarship.

In describing integration, Boyer alludes to the importance of systems thinking, which is also appropriate to research. In using systems thinking, integration means identifying and evaluating the sub-systems or parts that make up a whole entity and knowing how each one operates individually and collectively as a complete system. Examples of systems command structures include nation states, corporations, and terrorist organizations. A related factor is evaluating how the internal forces (e.g., leadership, personnel, and resources) and external forces (e.g., political, legal, and economic) affect a system, its parts, and its decision making.

Drucker incorporated the integration of differing thoughts with decision making. He said an effective decision is always a judgment based on diverging views, not on consensus.⁵ GEN Lucius Clay, USA, then-commander of the American military government in Germany, described General of the Army George C. Marshall's integrative approach this way: "It was evident that he enjoyed developing any divergencies in viewpoint ... so that they would be weighed in reaching his decisions."⁶ Alfred Sloan, former head of General Motors, was also integrative in his decision making. At a senior executive meeting, he said,

Gentlemen, I take it we are all in complete agreement on the decision here. ... Then ... I propose we postpone further discussion of this matter until our next meeting, to give ourselves time to develop disagreement and perhaps gain some understanding of what the decision is all about.⁷

Integration applied to research and decision making suggests that effective military leaders possess an attitude conducive to listening to opposing ideas



Knowledge transferred from the leader's skills is used to improve individual and unit readiness. (Photo by LCpl Seth Starr.)

willingly and asking for them if none are voiced. The leader's ability to pull together complex data and information from diverse sources, including those that foster disagreement, and create a comprehensive whole everyone can understand is the challenge and, perhaps, the obligation, however difficult.

The concept of integration is valid even when there is limited time to assess a situation and make a decision. It offers added advantages, though, especially when time is not a factor, as it allows for more information, insight, and critical thought in planning and decision making.

The scholarship of application. This third function's objective is to use knowledge in a way that Boyer refers to as service. It is designed to apply knowledge to consequential problems and to be helpful to individuals and institutions.

In this context, service activities should be tied to one's field of knowledge and relate to or flow from this professional activity. This is serious, demanding, and rigorous work that requires accountability typically associated with research. To avoid too narrow a view of application, it is new knowledge gained from service or application, as well as the discovery and utilization of knowledge gained from research. In

this dynamic process, knowledge arises from the practice and evaluation of an activity as well as from theories evaluated in practice.

For troop leaders, the scholarship of application means knowledge transferred from service activities associated with a leader's MOS. The objective is to use this knowledge to improve individual and unit readiness. Leaders may identify situations that require more research for further examination and testing, and results of this process may show that training methods or field exercises require modifications. An effective leader-scholar will recognize if any shortcomings exist and take appropriate steps to determine the causes.

In this case, action analysis with the intent of improving an activity, like a repetitive tactical drill, over time might be appropriate. This ongoing cycle is to learn to do, do to learn, practice what is learned, evaluate the outcome(s) through critical analysis and critique, and determine what improvements need to be made, if any, before doing it again. Document everything. Records should be maintained for easy access in an archive or computer file for later referral and use in instructional design, decision making, and planning. Such documentation is important to eliminate reliance on memory, which is susceptible to be-

ing forgotten. This process seems well suited to a leader's responsibilities for individual and unit training.

Application also relates directly to a leader's mission, which Drucker once described as objectively addressing the demands of the organization using intellectual integrity. His words remind us that the goal of a leader-scholar's work is to uncover the truth no matter where it may lead and that we need to develop systems thinking.

The scholarship of teaching. I place more emphasis on Boyer's final function, the scholarship of teaching, because it culminates in the dynamic integrated process of learning and teaching, a leader's critical responsibility. To Boyer, teaching involves academics sharing the results of their scholarship with others. Teaching merges the previous functions of discovery, integration, and application and enables this blend of functions to become operational in the interactive dynamics of teaching. It combines the art of arts and science of sciences and is akin to leaders conveying their knowledge to subordinates.

Boyer quotes Aristotle, who described teaching as the highest form of understanding, and adds that teaching is too often viewed as routine, something almost anyone can do, and that there is an underestimation of the work involved in teaching. Teaching is active hard work and, for an instructor, a rigorous learning experience.

Instructing is a vital function for leaders at all levels. Boyer writes that information can be well regarded only as professors, like leader-instructors, are widely read and intellectually engaged. He indicates that people lack awareness of the hard work and serious study that undergirds good teaching. The reality of teaching negates the view held by some that if one can't do anything else, he can teach. Not so!

Boyer, among others, writes that great teachers create a common ground of intellectual commitment and stimulate active, rather than passive, learning. Importantly, leader-scholars, like scholar-leaders, should encourage learners in the same way: to be critical thinkers with a thirst for continuous learning. This ongoing quest for learning should

be the mindset of all Marine leaders.

GEN S.L.A. Marshall, USA, believed that one's depth of thought comes from intensive additional study throughout one's career. He suggested that officers consult with scholars and leaders to determine the books that most invigorated their thinking,⁸ and his intent was to identify and read these works. Marshall probably would have agreed with President Harry S. Truman, who said, years earlier, "Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers."

GEN Marshall also said the best way for an officer to grow is to study harder than students. As instructors, leaders should be prepared beyond the content they are to teach. Further, he believed firmly that officers cannot be good instructors unless they learn to think deeply. His guidance remains valid. Clearly, Marshall bridged leadership with scholarship.

The leader-scholar as instructor must know his subject thoroughly, utilize the instructional methods that best contribute to learning and application, and, ideally, be able to create a teaching-learning environment that develops an enthusiasm for knowledge among students, regardless of content. The technique of military instruction training provides a message and a challenge for instructors: "There are no dull subjects, only dull instructors." Be innovative and realistic in the development of learning objectives, learn a variety of instructional techniques to achieve intended outcomes, and be objective in evaluating outcomes.

Here are some thoughts on subject matter. Problem-solving is typically a course of study. Consider, however, Dr. J. Sterling Livingston's ideas. He wrote over four decades ago that formal management education programs emphasized problem-solving and gave little attention to the skills required to identify potential problems, solve these problems early on, plan how to attain objectives, or initiate finalized operating plans.⁹ Livingston quoted Drucker, who indicated that all we get by solving a problem is a return to normality; nothing is gained.

Leaders might contemplate emphasizing problem prevention during

instruction and practice. Problems, if identified and corrected early on, would cost less in time and money and perhaps avoid accidents. If Marines' mindsets were to shift from waiting for problems to occur to instead preventing them, then such emphasis is worthy of consideration.

Another thought deals with teaching discipline. Leaders should consider GEN Marshall's definition. He stated, "Coming from the Latin, 'to discipline' means 'to teach.' Insofar as the military establishment of the United States is concerned, nothing need be added to that definition."¹⁰ This definition of discipline highlights its vital connection to teaching as a leadership function of scholarship. It also implies that not all teaching is formal. Effective leaders can initiate training on the spot because they know what training needs reinforcing and are prepared to teach informally and briefly at opportune times, during breaks, for instance, to individuals or units. This capability is embedded in the leader's professionalism and maximizes the use of available, and often very limited, time.

Boyer writes that good teachers, as scholars, are also learners and that teaching at its best transforms and extends knowledge. Through readings, discussions, and comments and questions from students, teachers will be pushed in creative new directions. The scholar in the Marine with the gift for good teaching will be the better leader.

Conclusion

Boyer provides a pathway for what it means to be a scholar—the recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, synthesis, practice, and instruction, as evidenced in his four scholarships: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Each function is tied inseparably to the others, as scholarship is to leadership. Forever fused, leadership and scholarship are dependent on one another for effective results. Boyer's ideas of scholarship, coupled with reinforcing thoughts from other scholars and business and military professionals, mesh well with the leadership principles Marines are taught.

Being a Marine leader requires the

demanding work of a scholar; there are no shortcuts. In preparing for future challenges, scholarship becomes even more vital for Marine leaders at all levels. Consider carefully Gen James N. Mattis' prescient comment, "We now have the same expectation of our non-commissioned officers as we do our field grade officers."¹¹ All Marines in leadership positions need to expand their knowledge and capabilities beyond their current ranks to learn more and become better able to assume more senior positions should the need arise.

A Marine leader's diligent use of scholarship functions should result in less cost, human and other, to accomplish mission objectives. Consequently, Marine leaders should adopt scholarship in attitude and regular practice to better themselves, their subordinates, and their units because it is critical to mission success! Leadership is scholarship!

Notes

1. Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1991).
2. Gregory Nazianzen, "Oration 2," translated by Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894), available at <http://www.newadvent.org>. A common paraphrase is, "to [lead] men is the art of arts and the science of sciences, for man is a being diverse and manifold in character."
3. Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, (Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).
4. Robert Lenzer and Stephen Johnson, "Seeing Things as They Really Are," *Forbes*, (New York, NY: 10 March 1997).
5. Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1966).
6. Ed Cray, *General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).
7. *The Effective Executive*.
8. GEN S.L.A. Marshall, *The Officer as a Leader*, (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1966).
9. J. Sterling Livingston, "Myth of the Well-Educated Manager," *Harvard Business Review*, (Brighton, MA: January 1971).
10. *The Officer as a Leader*.
11. Maj Justin M. Bellman, "Investing in the Infantry Sergeant: Small Unit Leader Training under the Construct of *Expeditionary Force 21* and the *36th Commandant's Planning Guidance*," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: June 2016).

>Author's Note: I recommend LTG Arthur S. Collins, Jr.'s 1978 book, *Common Sense Training: A Working Philosophy for Leaders, for practical and creative ideas.*

