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PROFESSIONALISM | VALOUR | WISDOM

SOLDIERS
PEOPLE
PEACE
NATION

NEEDED TRUSTING LEADERS

By

Lieutenant Colonel Sanjay P Vishwasrao

Colonel In Charge of Internal Security,
Chinar Corps, Kashmir

Trust Builds Teams That Win

I AM IN CHARGE

- Sees self as superior
- Commands, not connects
- Builds fear, not trust
- Focuses on tasks, not people
- Creates distance
- Leads to high attrition and low morale

Authority without trust breeds resistance.

SOLDIERS AND ASSETS ARE IN MY CHARGE

- Builds trust and confidence
- Leads by example
- Values people and resources
- Empowers and develops
- Creates ownership
- Generates commitment and results

Trust unlocks the full potential of your team.

S P VISHWASRAO

"*Trust is not a single act,
It is a daily practice.*"

LEAD | INSPIRE | EMPOWER | ACHIEVE

NEEDED TRUSTING MILITARY LEADERS

By
Lieutenant Colonel SP Vishwasrao, Sena Medal

Introduction

Whether you lead ten Indian soldiers or ten million Indian soldiers, the essentials of leadership are the same. These essentials have been the same for over 5000 years since Bhishma gave his leadership treatise to the Pandavas during the battle of Mahabharatha. The situation today requires us to revisit the battlefield of Kurukshetra and conduct a self-appraisal of our leadership aims and styles based on Bhishma's golden nuggets of wisdom. The troika of relevant nuggets is as under:-

- **Nugget 1**- Conduct of leaders should be above reproach, with personal passions under strict control.
- **Nugget 2**- Satisfying self-interest of troops is the key to motivation, while sublimating leader's own self-interests is the key to gaining trust of those we lead.
- **Nugget 3**- A leader should guard his command as his mother guarded him; with love and sacrifice.

The greatest crisis faced by any Armed Force today is the CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP and the greatest crisis of military leadership is FRUGALITY OF TRUST. This contemporary crisis is characterised by **'Results'**, **'Trying'**, **'Pleasure'** and **'Recognition'** vis-à-vis the ideal situation of **'Virtue'**, **'Trusting'**, **'Serving'** and **'Modesty'**. Very briefly, the problem is in, **Doing without Being'**.

This is in stark contrast to the Mahavakya on leadership which has been articulated in just four phrases viz;

TO BE, TO DO, TO SEE and TO TELL

Amoral Ambitions

'To Be' is character and knowledge and is the source of leadership while, **'To Do'** is the style of leadership by personal example. **'To See'** and **'To Tell'** are the tools of leadership. This leadership philosophy can be summed up as under:-

"Who you are in leadership is more important than what you say or even do."

'To Be' means the aggregate of all that there is in a leader and is composed of his values, qualities and professional competence. The effectiveness and potential of a leader is directly in proportion to the strength and balance of his **'To Be'**. Therefore, the self-introspecting arrow that we need to pierce our hearts with is:-

"Are we leading blinded by our ambition or by the larger purpose of our calling?"

The attempt certainly is not at maligning ambition and ambitious leaders. Ambition is not necessarily wrong, unless it is driven by self-aggrandisement, as is the case with careerist

soldiers. The real culprit is modern amoral leadership, which is a self-absorbing style that magnifies leadership itself, instead of facilitating its beneficiaries viz; one's command, the troops.

In Charge vis-à-vis My Charge

The System/Organisation selects leaders (commanders) based on merit and appoint them **'In Charge'** of a Formation Unit/ Sub-unit. The **'I Am In Charge'**, syndrome has the potential of pushing newly crowned commanders up the gum tree and into misuse of power and privileges. It would therefore, be more appropriate and prudent to reword this System tasking/responsibility to make it sound and appear onerous as, **'This Unit is placed in My Charge'**. The subtle difference between the attitude of **'I Am In Charge'** and **'This is in My Charge'** is the source of one's desire to lead. In the latter, the source is the desire to work for the organisation and in the former; it is the desire to use the organisation for self-aggrandisement. It is the difference between one's command being perceived as a **'stepping -stone'** or as a **'milestone'** and, between **'I and Me'** and **'We and Us'**. The crisis of 'frugality of trust' in military leadership can be met by developing an ethos based on **'A charge to keep I have'** ie; God has placed this Formation Unit/ Sub-unit in my safe custody and I have the responsibility of nurturing its professional effectiveness and well-being. Continued in the same vein, 'I cannot fail him, the Nation, the Army, my command or myself in the performance of this divine duty'. Note the Chetwodian priority in the statement.

Appointed Leaders vis-à-vis Called Leaders

As mentioned earlier, the Army appoints us as leaders/commanders and hence, strictly speaking we have not risen from the cauldron of 'soldiers+situation+leader'. This results in lacking of sense of ***'Having being Called to Lead'***; called by God, soldiers or the situation. Such a system of appointed leaders/ commanders has the potential of giving birth to the leader's desire to use their allotted Formation/ Unit/ Sub-unit as a stepping-stone. Resultantly, appointed leaders tend to channelise their energies towards self and focus on using the occasion to rise. They are likely to display a strong desire to lead and to be recognised; ideas we could do well by discouraging. On the contrary, a sense of ***'Having been given the Trumpet Call to Lead'***, initiates leaders to channelise their energies towards their followers and thus rise to the occasion. Called Leadership is what we need to build into our system. Structured leadership and spiritual training thus emerge as pre-requisites in assisting potential leaders and commanders in listening to and understanding the phonetics of God's Trumpet Call for Leadership.

Command's Trust in Leaders

Leaders / commanders given charge of a unit do not become responsible for troops, equipment and traditions alone but, also of the trust of their command. Indian soldiers repose unquestionable and absolute trust in their leaders even if they have been appointed and not called (preferred) by them. This trust and faith is blind and is not qualified or quantified, for it is unto death. We therefore, need to realise that our greatest source of power is not the (number of) troops and

equipment at our disposal, but the trust that we derive from faithfully serving our command. Therefore, an important operational imperative is,

"Now it is required that those who have been called and given trust must prove faithful."

Inadequate realisation of trust as a source of power and misplaced belief of 'power from quantity' will lead to distortion in the sound of the trumpet call. If the trumpet call is uncertain, who then will prepare himself for the battle? Let us introspect and honestly answer these questions:-

- Did the trumpet call for OPERATION VIJAY and OPERATION PARAKRAM sound clearly enough?
- Is the trumpet call for OPERATION RAKSHAK-II (J&K) clear and precise?
- Have we heard and understood the notes of the trumpet call of India Vision 2020 and Army Vision 2020?

Developing Trust

Why do we trust our parents and our spouses, and why do our children trust us? Leaders who have proved worthy of being trusted by their command have developed trust and faith because they:-

- Display a track record of credibility, reliability and sincerity.
- Do not wilfully make a bad decision (act of commission in human relation or tactical issues).
- Always act and lead with wisdom and integrity.
- Guard their command as their own mothers have treated them, with love and sacrifice.

Narcissism and Pragmatism in Leaders

An apetite/ desire for the intoxicating and narcotic bloom of success and, the fleeting power and prestige that goes with it, leads many a man into the quagmire of pomposity and self-importance. In such a situation arises the desire to preserve our self and see the sight of our reflection in the mirror of ego. Immersed in this tragedy of self-absorption, we begin to execute power without sensitivities and jockey for power and privileges of power. Leaders/ commanders then became more concerned with their own image and personal interests than doing that which is right. **Self love in power!** We need to realise the relevance of a fundamental truth of life- pleasure of self-absorption and power however intoxicating, is always fleeting. This self-love in power is the primary reason for the state of ruin of the fortress of leadership. Mere wanting and craving without knowing what and how, leads to a disastrous condition.

Higher leadership seldom fails because of technical incompetence (poor physical fitness, firing and field craft). Instead, it fails because of poor people skills, judgement and character. Today we find that, character is dying in favour of profit, results and pragmatism. The result; the most successful commander is one who does whatever it takes to achieve his objective(s). Higher leaders are looking for middle rung leaders who will serve their personal interest(s)

and the rotting chain continues top down. The leader's image becomes bigger than the world and, all virtues remain but a means to an end. The philosophy of 'Results' demands efficient leaders who are, 'more result oriented than moral oriented'. In absence of restraining reins on our desires and dreams, personal survival and pleasure becomes the only true god. Flamboyance and charisma get brownie points while, calm character and deep-rooted virtues get the sack.

"What ever a man wants badly and persistently enough , will determine the man's character"

We become what we want. So lets make our choices:-

- Want privileges - Mendacious.
- Want money - Corrupt.
- Want kills - Murderer.
- Want to win hearts - Benefactor.
- Want to be trusted - Leader.

Are we becoming an Army where character is dying in favour of profits, results and pragmatism? Have we made the result, an end in itself? Is this leading us to cut corners, turn a blind eye, pass unlawful commands and search for quick fire solutions to long-term problems? **CERTAINLY NOT!!!!**

Tyranny of Privileges

I deserve it! I have earned it! These statements represent victims of self-love no longer governed by grounded realities. Abuse of privileges is a character flaw that suggests that the chair has become grander than its very purpose. Use of privileges reveals leadership intent and all around us, we are being exposed to blatant misuse that is further distancing leaders from their command. This summer of greed will irrevocably lead to a winter of ruin characterised by a crisis of mistrust. No honour among thieves! It is this flawed leadership, which is the real culprit in cases of suicide, fratricide, pilferage and fake operations. There appears to be an utter disregard of higher laws of decency that should govern our behaviour and thus help us in grasping our place in the trio of God-Leader-Command. We need to disown privileges and cultivate simplicity and a mere-ness that will elevate our leadership and build trust among our command. The only path to re-building our purpose and trust is by democratisation of leadership and privileges. We need a change of heart initiated by re-invention of self. The best way of overcoming trust deficit is by simplifying leadership. Patience, care for command, and a code of ethics can simplify leadership. Its time to stop pushing the bottom line any lower and re-draw it in line with our hearts.

"It is not living that is important, but living rightly"

In this situation of frugality and deficiency of trust, we need not do the best and brightest as our leaders, but the modest and moral too. We desperately need the qualities we are extinguishing. We desperately need simple mere leaders/commanders.

Mere Leaders for Army Vision 2020

India Vision 2020 and its Army Vision 2020 have been declared. The trumpet call has been

sounded for building organisations of the future and developing 'mere leaders' for a world at constant war. Our Vision requires leaders who inspire trust and produce action amongst their command for the trumpet call. These are ordinary men with extraordinary determination and high emotional intelligence. As the crisis in leadership is of character, not of competence, our Army needs a revival of old Vedic concepts. This translates not into sophisticated leaders, but genuine, selfless, hard working, virtuous, unpretentious and trustworthy leaders who are not marked by excess of thought, but by fertile and generous emotions. Effective democratic leaders refine views of their charge in ways that transcends the surface noise of pettiness, contradictions and self-interest.

"Leader is all heart. The little obscure things make legions"

A word of caution- listening to ones command should not make a leader prisoner to their demands (tail should not wag the dog).

Emotional intelligence is the primary distinguishing factor between great mere leaders and average leaders. Most effective leaders are the quiet and calm individuals who resolve big problems through a long series of small efforts. Leaders should lead without appearing to lead; without self-ego or ambition for self.

Developing Mere Leadership

"A mans character is his future."

The four defining legs of 'Mere Leadership' are leader, command, shared goal and shared humanity built on a solid foundation of mutual trust. Some measures that could help develop mere leaders in Generation Next are as under:-

- Formal organisation wide leadership training.
- Accountability of commanders established through a 360-degree feedback system.
- Well designed and articulated organisational code of ethics.
- Empowering one's command through democratisation of leadership, delegation of powers and, decentralisation of authority.

'Trust of command' which is the sacred charge of a commander can be developed and generated by the following C^5 formula: -

- **Congruity**. We need to maintain congruity in 'To Be' and 'To Do' spheres of our personality and display authenticity in behaviour.
- **Caring**. We need to display genuine love and care for our command.
- **Competence**.Professional competence though essential, is today being over emphasised. Competence in human relations is more important.
- **Constancy**. We need to wear the same face at work, home and in social or religious institutions.
- **Candour**. We need to be candid about own shortcomings and limitations.

Pinnacle of Leadership

We should aim to achieve the pinnacle of leadership by observing ethical obedience, developing mere leadership, creating

organisational vision, meeting needs of our charge, and training Generation Next towards a long lasting legacy of mere leaders. Simultaneously, we should be doing what is right, when it is right and because it is right. We should be doing the right because we are courageous, idealistic, tenacious, virtuous and above all humble. For mission accomplishment of Army Vision 2020, the quintessential success imperative is 'developing trust in our command', for trust is the one thing that makes or breaks a leader and his organisation. What better role model to choose than Mother Teresa whose disavowal power, fame, and wealth and, yet became powerful and famous? I can hear my trumpet call, can you-

"Initiate an era of integrity and trust in the unit in my charge"

LEADERS SELF APPRAISAL

(Answer the questions below and make your own leadership roadmap)

- Do I have a proper view of my leadership?
- Am I considered a trusted leader?
- Am I motivated to be faithful to keep the trust of my command?
- Do I have a genuine sense of purpose other than self-ambition, in leading my command?
- Am I tenaciously dedicated to my leadership objectives of success of my organisation and empathy to my command?
- How am I handling my privileges?
- Am I investing enough in my legacy?



IC-48621W Lieutenant Colonel SP Vishwasrao, Sena Medal was commissioned into 11 RAJ RIF in 1989. The officer has served in OPERATION PAWAN, OPERATION RAKSHAK-I, OPERATION RAKSHAK-II, OPERATION MEGHDOOT, OPERATION VIJAY and OPERATION PARAKRAM. He is an alumnus of NDA and DSSC. He has been awarded four gallantry awards in various operations. He has served as Instructor Class C Commando Wing and as Brigade Major of Headquarter 93 Infantry Brigade. He is presently serving in Young Officers Wing, Infantry School, Mhow and is commanding officer designate 18 Rashtriya Rifles (RAJ RIF).

Concluding Remarks — Relevance as of 2026

'Placed in My Charge, Not I Am in Charge' — Ram Tattva, Shivaji Tattva, and Ethical Leadership Today

Added in 2026 by the author, Major General Sanjay P Vishwasrao, Sena Medal (twice), to the original 2006 article published in The Infantry Journal (India).

This article was written in 2006, in the weeks before I was given command of 18 Rashtriya Rifles — the same command in which the ethos argued for here was then actually lived, in Lolab, under fire. The single distinction it turns on — 'this is placed in my charge' versus 'I am in charge' — has stayed the spine of every command, campaign and institution I have since been entrusted with.

Ram Tattva and Shivaji Tattva — The Indic Roots of a Charge Held in Trust

Indic tradition offers two complementary archetypes for exactly this distinction. Ram Tattva is the principle of the ruler who holds power only in trust for dharma and for his people — maryada purushottam, the one who binds himself to a code stricter than the one he asks of anyone else, and who will set aside his own comfort, and even his own claim, rather than break faith with the people placed in his charge. Shivaji Tattva is its complement in action: Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj building Swarajya not by commanding from a distance, but by trusting merit over birth, decentralising real authority to his commanders through the Ashta Pradhan council, and treating every fort and every subject as a trust to be protected and grown, not a possession to be exploited. Between them, Ram Tattva supplies the restraint — power bound by dharma — and Shivaji Tattva supplies the method — trust extended outward, and protection extended to all. 'This is placed in my charge' is, at heart, both tattvas held together: the humility of Ram and the active, protective trust-building of Shivaji.

Why This Distinction Still Matters

'I am in charge' asks what the organisation can do for the leader; 'this is placed in my charge' asks what the leader owes the organisation, and everyone inside it. Every failure of leadership this article catalogues — self-absorption, the tyranny of privilege, results pursued without character — traces back to quietly answering that question the wrong way.

Relevance for Corporate Companies, Trusts and Institutions

A CEO or board member is not the owner of the capital, culture or legacy they are given — they are its trustee for a season, exactly as a commanding officer is trustee of a unit's soldiers, traditions and future. Companies that quietly drift toward 'I am in charge' — leadership measured by privilege, visibility and personal upside — show the same symptoms this article names in 2006: eroding trust, high attrition, cut corners in pursuit of results, and a widening distance between leaders and the people who actually carry out the work. The correction is the same one this article argues for: an explicit, lived ethos of 'this is placed in my charge,' with real accountability built in — the article's own prescription of 360-degree feedback, a clearly articulated code of ethics, and genuine delegation of authority translates directly into board-level governance and institutional culture today. For a trust, a foundation, or any institution holding something on behalf of others by definition, the fit is even more direct: the very word 'trust' is the ethos this article is arguing for.

Corporate and Institutional Parallel — Stewardship, Not Ownership

The leaders who build lasting institutions are the ones who never stop feeling the weight of 'this is placed in my charge' — who treat capital, culture, people and reputation as things to be handed on stronger than they found them, not resources to be drawn down for their own tenure. This is a due-diligence question worth asking of any leader before they are trusted with an institution's future: do they see the role as a possession, or a charge?

Relevance for Think Tanks and Podcasters — A Voice on Ethical Leadership

This article was written twenty years ago, and re-tested in the field ever since — in Kashmir, in Assam and Manipur, and across every institution since entrusted to me. It offers think tanks and podcast audiences a genuinely Indic, field-tested vocabulary for a subject usually discussed only in Western management terms: Ram Tattva and Shivaji Tattva as living frameworks for ethical leadership, trust, and the difference between holding power and holding a charge. I am available to write and speak on this same subject — for institutions building their own leadership pipelines, and for audiences looking for an Indic answer to a universal leadership question.