

Running head: The Leadership of General Savage

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The Leadership of General Savage in *12 O'clock High*

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Introduction

Leadership is an essential component of successful military action, especially in times of war. War is the type of crisis that has been said to separate the ‘men from the boys’. Leaders are molded from the situations thrust upon them. As they interact with the mix of people, resources, information and environment, leaders are affected by and have a profound effect upon the outcomes. To be effective, a leader must understand and identify with those that are to be lead. People will only follow if the leader’s vision reflects their ideals and values. It is a two-way street; a good leader is also a good follower (Bolman & Deal, 1997). So, it is with General Frank Savage (played by Gregory Peck), the general in charge of the beleaguered 918th Bomber Squadron based in England during the early stages of World War II. Peck’s character, General Frank Savage was modeled after Brigadier General Frank A. Armstrong, Jr.

The storyline of *12 O’clock High* is told retrospectively by a Major Stovall (played by Dean Jagger), who was the squadron’s ‘office clerk’. The screenplay is based upon a composite of several Army-Air Force squadrons under tremendous pressure to suppress the German war machine before ground troops were sent into harm’s way in 1942. Flying B-17 bombers, known as ‘Flying Fortresses’ the squadron had been called upon to make deep sorties into enemy territory without rest. The crews are suffering from fatigue, the loss of planes and fellow flight crews and what appeared to be a lack of leadership. Morale was at an all time low. The current commander, Colonel Keith Davenport (played by Gary Merrill) has become ineffective by General Savage’s standards – “he is too close to his men”. Savage requests and gets command of the spirit-broken squadron.

The opening scene of Stovall’s 1949 visit to the now deserted air field is filled with the symbolism of the 918th Bomber Squadron’s mementoes – the beer mug, the dart board, and the officer’s club – permeate the senses. Through Stovall’s words the viewer is transported back in time to when the circumstances of the world were dire and the microcosm of the 918th Bomber Squadron was even more so.

Discussion

In *Twelve O’clock High* General Frank Savage employed several leadership styles to influence members of the 918th Bomber Squadron. Discussion will lend itself to Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames of Leadership (Appendix A1) and to issues relating to charismatic, transformational and cultural leadership found in Yukl (Appendixes B1 and C1). A definition of each style is to be presented first in order to better understand the sequences of events that defined both General Savage and the men of the 918th. Typically, the military is viewed as a machine bureaucracy, with top down leadership – structural in totality. Within this structure, however, the complexities of leadership can manifest in multitudinous styles.

Part of Savage’s vision was to reshape the 918th from the previously undisciplined, yet strongly people-oriented culture nurtured by his predecessor Colonel

Davenport into a disciplined team-oriented culture that was goal focused. According to Schein (as cited in Yukl, 1998) a leader can shape the cultural aspect of a group or organization by providing appropriate feedback and directives (attention), does not bend the rules under pressure (reactions to crises), practices what he preaches (role modeling), recognizes and rewards achievements (allocation of rewards), and by setting the ground rules for success (criteria for selection and dismissal). There are secondary mechanisms that also come into play: “(1) design of systems and procedures, (2) design of organizational structure, (3) design of facilities, (4) stories, legends and myths, and (5) formal statements” (p. 331). Additionally, Trice and Beyer (as cited in Yukl, 1998) pointed out that “a leader either makes drastic changes in the existing culture or establishes a new organization with a different culture” (p.332). Being wartime, in short supply of trained men and proper equipment, and trying to prove that precision daylight bombing was the proper scenario for winning the war, the former conclusion was the only option available to Savage – make drastic changes to the existing culture (Appendix D). From the chewing out of the gate guard, to the demotion of Sergeant McIllhenny, to the cancellation of all leaves, to the arresting of Lieutenant Colonel Ben Gately, to the formation of the Leper Colony, to the closing of the bar – all were radical and unconventional, but necessary methods to reshape the existing culture to conform to Savage’s vision. Thus, properly executed, this forced change can have an indirect effect on their motivation and overall behavior, which in turn will directly affect the organization’s outcome (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Yukl, 1998).

The cultural aspect (within the Human Resources Frame) is the infrastructure of the leader’s style. Charisma and situational leadership are often intertwined. In time of war the situation forces critical choices. The outcome produces leaders and followers. In order for a leader to emerge there must be followers willing to follow. To be charismatic the leader must have the ability to influence and compel the follower to see what is presented by the leader. Persuasion or influence is an essential element in leadership (Bolman & Deal, 1997). It is the focal point of leader’s energetic and emotional appeal that draws the follower into the leader’s vision. Therefore, it is the follower that ultimately decides if the leader is charismatic by their trusting acceptance of the leader’s beliefs and values. Once accepted changes to the organization can begin to occur (Yukl, 1998). It is within the structural frame that the leader performs the environmental scans to determine and implement what their constituents need and want; within the political frame the leader uses persuasion to affect the changes desired (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

There is a desperate situation with the 918th - poor discipline, no military courtesy, mismatched uniforms, excessive drinking, lax security and a general disrespect for authority. Savage placed himself in this situation because he has high self-esteem, strong values, a clearly focused vision of what the 918th was supposed to be (a sense of mission), a sense of pride and he is confident and motivated that he can turn the group around. Structurally, Savage was focused on the implementation, but from a Human Resource and Political Frame it would be a difficult task indeed. All Savage must do is gain the group’s trust and respect. Therefore in an effort to assess the distribution of power and interests of the squadron’s personnel, Savage’s unconventional, radical and

assertive strategies emerge because a major change is necessary (Bolman & Deal, 1997)
Charismatic leaders are change agents. (Yukl, 1998)

Situations of leadership

Savage finds that Gately is not on base and has the Military Police find him, arrest him and return him to base. Savage disciplines Gately, blaming him for the previous commander's downfall, then demotes him, but assigns him as bomber commander for the Leper Colony – the misfits of the 918th – a structural solution with significant symbolic implications. This somewhat demoralizes Gately, but Savage is using unconventional assertive behavior to force Gately to change. From the HR perspective, Savage knows that Gately has a strong service record and his file indicates that he is capable of being a competent officer. Gately's road to redemption is through the Leper Colony. Gately soon learns that his behavior affects his unit (self-realization). It is a transformational state for Gately (Yukl, 1998). According to Burns (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 1997), transforming leaders “evoke their constituents' better nature and move them toward higher and more universal needs and purposes” (p. 314).

During the first air mission briefing Savage allows no rest for the weary. However in hopes of finding allies, he offers a transfer to anyone who does not believe what he believes. This offering is symbolic, yet it is a real step in trying to draw the men to his vision of the 918th being a capable, efficient day light bomb squadron. Savage soon learns that very pilot wants a transfer. It was a calculated risk of political negotiation that Savage had to take. Now it was time to reflect and evaluate. (Bolman & Deal, 1997)

Flight Surgeon Captain Kaiser assessed the mental condition of the group at Savage's request. He reported to Savage that the men are over-strained and still numb from the departure of Colonel Davenport. Kaiser also asks Savage to lighten up on the men. Savage feels otherwise – wants them to be proud of their unit. Pride in the 918th is tantamount to Savage – it was his obsession. Savage strongly maintains that he is confident that he can rebuild the 918th. Self-confidence is indicative of a charismatic leader (Yukl, 1998).

During the second air mission briefing in an effort to build linkage with the flight crews Savage commends the unit on their improved performance, even making a joke about the Germans being afraid of the 918th, but no one laughs. As he reviews the previous mission he challenges each man to justify his actions during the mission. Savage singles out one of the pilots that fell back to assist a fellow pilot in trouble. Savage berates him for violating group integrity. He states that such actions reduce the group's protective firepower and endanger other crews. Planes are expendable - one's obligation to the group is not, he lectures. Savage is framing the experience for all to hear using his values to show how other's actions affects other crew members. Using the analogy of the plane and one's obligation he is sending a strong message to capture the attention of those attending. He is pushing for conformance (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

Adjunct Major Harvey Stovall sees Savage's intentions to shape up the 918th. He makes it clear to Savage that his loyalty is to Savage and not to the previous commander,

Davenport. This is the first important step in gaining the acceptance of the squadron. Stovall proves to be a worthy ally with whom Savage can discuss issues and receive candid feedback about the opinions of the squadron members. This becomes even more evident when Stovall works with Savage to stall the transfer requests so that Savage will have more time to implement his strategies.

Davenport and Savage disagree on how to handle the unit during a meeting where the holding of transfers was discussed. Davenport wants Savage to go easy on the men, stating that they should have time off. This is the point that caused Savage to relieve Davenport of command – Savage finds this “being weak”. Savage states that he wants to empower his men by giving them a clear focus and direction so that they can develop the technical competence and the physical and moral courage to complete a mission. It is conventional wisdom versus unconventional – status quo versus the unfamiliar. Savage is beginning to seek ways to better motivate the squadron members, but at the same time he is beginning to identify more closely with the squadron. His success is their success and vice versa.

When General Pritchard calls off an important mission due to bad weather the 918th is already airborne. Savage is flying with his men and when told to return to base feigns radio malfunction in order to complete the mission. The 918th successfully completes the bombing mission under adverse conditions. Savage feels really good about his men. Although Pritchard chews Savage out for disobeying an order to return to base Savage takes the opportunity to tell Pritchard that the mission gave his men the pride they needed. He then asks Pritchard to give a commendation to the group for their aggressiveness, skill and courage under adverse conditions. At this juncture Savage is again being unconventional and radical by seizing the moment to further his vision of rebuilding the group’s morale and confidence. Pritchard can only agree since it was he who wanted the 918th battle ready. It is a political victory for Savage and one that he feels will endear the squadron by bolstering its pride of accomplishment. Symbolically, it reinforces Savage’s vision.

Savage finds that his men do not share the pride he does in the successful mission. Soliciting Lieutenant Jesse Bishop, Savage seeks to find out why. Savage gives Bishop a ‘pep talk’, but again Bishop responds by telling Savage that he doesn’t have the confidence he needs to make the grade. At this point Savage tells Bishop that, “It’s easy to transfer out of the group, Jesse, but it is pretty hard for a man to transfer out of his obligation.” (*Twelve O’clock High*) Savage believes that the unit is obligated to the nation and to their uniform – a symbolic reference. It is a matter that transcends the microcosm of the air base; it is the winning of the war that Savage knows must happen. Savage has tried to inspire and motivate Bishop, knowing that he is important to the success of the squadron. Using a process of empowerment Savage was also adapting to the culture of the squadron.

By the third briefing mission the inspector general is breathing down Savage’s neck. Thinking that he would be found at fault for holding up the transfers Savage has resigned himself to failure and cleans off his desk. Major Joe Cobb, the new air

executive officer makes Savage's day by announcing that the men had withdrawn their transfer requests. According to Cobb "they finally realized they had a chance to hit the target and get home when you were up front leading" (*12 O'clock High*). One trait of a charismatic leader is to be an exemplary role model (Yukl, 1998). The withdrawing of the transfer requests indicated a shift in previously held values. The unit was rediscovering itself and adapting to the vision expressed by Savage. There was now a clear acceptance of Savage's leadership - during the next flight briefing they laughed at his jokes.

A charismatic leader must sustain their ability to involve their followers, but Savage does not want his men dependent upon him as he saw them on Davenport. Sharing the leadership as he did with Cobb, Bishop and others is a way to reward and maintain followers (Yukl, 1998). Still Savage is becoming a larger than life energizing force to his men. His men now see him in a different light. What he has seen they are beginning to see, but again there is no rest for the weary. Savage knows the unit still needs improvement and pushes onward.

After returning from a successful mission over Germany, Savage learns that McIlhenny was aboard one of the flights as a gunner. Savage is furious and demotes him (again). But Cobb informs Savage that this creates a problem as the chaplain, the squadron doctor and Stovall all have participated in the mission. In what has become almost humorous Savage rescinds his order to demote McIlhenny. Here again are signs that not only the airmen, but the ground crews are being caught up in the transformation of the unit from one of despair to one of hope and pride. No longer are they running from duty, they are seeking it. They have purpose and direction because of Savage's strong convictions, insight, self-confidence, self-determination and visionary motivation. The effects on the men of the 918th are from the efforts of a charismatic leader using all four leadership frames of Bolman and Deal.

The intensity of the bombing runs continues. Gately had been hospitalized, Cobb is lost over Germany, and by the start of the third day Savage collapses. Gately who has recovered takes Savage's plane and commands the mission. In true Hollywood style Savage remains in a catatonic state until he hears the planes return successfully from their mission. This flight validates the transformation of the 918th, for it is now committed to Savage's vision. The men of the 918th now understand their commander's intent and have successfully executed a mission based upon that intent. It is also within this segment that Gately has transcended the Leper Colony through Savage's empowerment. Gately now shares the same high professionalism as Savage. The unconventional and radical actions of Savage are clear to Gately. It is the power of the charismatic leader that changes individuals and organizations (Yukl, 1998).

Conclusions/Observations

The military is wrought with structure and symbolism. There must be order within the chaos. *12 O'clock High* is profound in taking the mental anguish of war time and placing a humanistic face on the intricacies of interpersonal interactions.

This is not just about an Army-Air Force squadron in a nose dive, it about the transformation of the squadron members and their new commander. Each is taken to a higher level by the other – what has become good for organization has become good for the individuals.

“Well, I can tell you right now what the problem is. I saw it in your faces last night. I can see it there now. You’ve been looking at a lot of air lately, and you feel you need a rest. In short, you’re feeling sorry for yourselves. Now, I don’t have a lot of patience with this ‘What are we fighting for?’ stuff. We’re in a war, a shooting war. We’ve got to fight. And, some of us have got to die.” Gregory Peck as General Frank Savage, from the movie, *12 O'clock High*.

Appendix A

Table A1. Bolman and Deal's Four Frames of Leadership (1997, pp. 306-317)

1. Structural Leaders
 - a. Do homework
 - b. Rethink relationships of structure, strategy and environment
 - c. Focus on implementation
 - d. Experiment, evaluate and adapt
2. Human Relations Leaders
 - a. Believe in people and communicate their belief
 - b. Are visible and accessible
 - c. Empower others
3. Political Leaders
 - a. Clarify what they want and what they can get
 - b. Assess the distribution of power and interests
 - c. Build linkages to key stakeholders
 - d. Persuade first, negotiate second, and use coercion only if necessary
4. Symbolic Leaders
 - a. Use symbols to capture attention
 - b. Frame experience
 - c. Discover and communicate vision
 - d. Tell stories

Appendix B

Table B1. Guidelines for Implementing Change (Yukl, 1998, p.448)

1. Guidelines for Political/Organization Action
 - a. Determine who can oppose or facilitate change
 - b. Build a broad coalition to support the change
 - c. Fill key positions with competent change agents
 - d. Use task forces to guide implementation
 - e. Make dramatic, symbolic changes that affect the work
 - f. If necessary, implement change initially on a small scale
 - g. Change relevant aspects of the organization structure
 - h. Monitor the progress of change
2. Guidelines for People-Oriented Actions
 - a. Create a sense of urgency about the need for change
 - b. Prepare people to adjust to change
 - c. Help people deal with the pain of change
 - d. Keep people informed about the progress of change
 - e. Demonstrate continued commitment to the change
 - f. Empower people to implement the change

Appendix C

Table C1. Important Types of Leadership Behaviors (Yukl, 1998, p.496)

1. Task Behavior
 - a. Organize work activities to improve efficiency
 - b. Develop action plans for a project
 - c. Determine what resources are needed to do a project
 - d. Clarify role expectations for others
 - e. Clarify standards for task performance
 - f. Facilitate collection and dissemination of information
 - g. Monitor operations and performance
 - h. Resolve immediate problems disrupting the work
2. Relations Behavior
 - a. Listen attentively to a person's concerns
 - b. Provide support and encouragement
 - c. Socialize with people to build relationships
 - d. Recognize contributions and accomplishments
 - e. Provide coaching and mentoring
 - f. Consult with people on decisions affecting them
 - g. Help people resolve conflicts
 - h. Keep people informed about actions affecting them
3. Transformational and Change Behaviors
 - a. Lead by example and model exemplary behavior
 - b. Encourage people to look at things from a different perspective
 - c. Express confidence people can attain challenging objectives
 - d. Interpret events to create a sense of urgency about change
 - e. Study competitors and outsiders to get ideas for improvements
 - f. Envision exciting new possibilities for the organization
 - g. Develop innovative new strategies linked to core competencies
 - h. Build a coalition of key people to get change approved
 - i. Form task forces to guide implementation of change
 - j. Make symbolic changes that affect the work
 - k. Empower people to implement new strategies
 - l. Announce and celebrate progress in implementing change
 - m. Encourage and facilitate learning by individuals and teams
 - n. Experiment with new approaches

Appendix D

Table D1 – Elements of Cultural Leadership and Consequences for Organizational Cultures (Yukl, 1998, p.333)

Leadership Elements	Innovation	Maintenance
1. Perceived situation	Serious crisis	No serious crisis
2. Vision and mission	Radical ideology	Conservative ideology
3. Leader Behaviors	Act as effective role model Express confidence in group Articulate ideology Communicate high expectations Emphasize and celebrate success Inspire commitment to new values	Act as effective role model Express confidence in group Articulate ideology Communicate high expectations Emphasize and celebrate success Inspire commitment to old values
4. Administrative action	New strategies and structures	Incremental improvements in strategy and structure
5. Use of cultural forms	To communicate new values To help institutionalize change	To affirm existing values To preserve continuity
6. Personal qualities	Self-confidence Strong convictions Dramatic and expressive	Confidence in group Strong convictions Persuasive
7. Follower attributions	Leader has special qualities needed to deal with crisis	Leader represents values successful in the past
8. Performance	Success in managing crisis	Continued success of group

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