The Nathan Solution to the Bathsheba Syndrome

The failure of success revisited

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Tom Vanden Brook reported in a July 2013 *USA Today* article that the Department of Defense's Inspector General substantiated 88 cases of personal misconduct by military leadership between October 2012 and March 2013.[1] Furthermore, in an article in the *Naval War College Review* titled "The Navy's Moral Compass: Commanding Officers and Personal Misconduct," Navy CAPT Mark Light stated that "the U.S. Navy has an integrity problem in the ranks of commanding officers."[2] CAPT Light noted that 23 Navy commanding officers (COs) were detached for cause in 2010, with at least 50 percent from misconduct such as adultery, sexual harassment, drunkenness, and/or fraternization. The Marine Corps is not immune from moral and ethical misconduct and failure in leadership.

What is the cause of moral and ethical failure among military leaders? Did GEN David Petraeus wake up one morning and randomly engage in an adulterous affair with his biographer? Senior leaders being relieved due to personal misconduct is a significant leadership problem.

Some conclude that leaders' moral and ethical failures are a matter of abuse of power. An article written by Al Lewis identified that the size of one's office, desk, and chair may lead to moral and ethical failure—even committing a crime.[3] Lewis based this idea on peer-reviewed research by leading universities titled "The Ergonomics of Dishonesty: The Effect of Incidental Posture on Stealing, Cheating, and Traffic Violations." The researchers discovered that work environments that "expand the body can inadvertently lead us to feel more powerful, and these feelings of power can cause dishonest behavior."[4] Are the moral and ethical failures of leaders the result of having offices that are too big? Or are their failures the result of other factors such as personal hubris, institutional corruption, or something more subtle like the success of leadership?

This article reexamines the phenomenon of moral and ethical failure due to personal misconduct, not from the perspective of the "big office" syndrome, but as a result of the "Bathsheba Syndrome." By recalling the key findings of the leadership article by Dean C. Ludwig and Clinton O. Longenecker titled "The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders," the story of David and Bathsheba is recast from Nathan the Prophet's perspective.[5]

This article *is not a theology lesson* in leadership, but instead uses the story of Nathan to demonstrate a leadership principle: *Every leader needs a trusted cadre of reprovers within his circle of trust, just as Nathan was to David.* Also, we present two professional perspectives on this subject—one from a Navy chaplain and the other from a Marine judge advocate. The article concludes with recommendations for leadership training and education within the Marine Corps in order to strengthen moral resilience and warrior readiness.

The authors are very mindful that the overwhelming majority of COs keep their honor clean and live out the Navy's and Marine Corps' core values and uphold the law as expressed in Title 10.[6] However, we are just as mindful that personal misconduct in Marine Corps leadership weakens the Corps' warfighting capability and tarnishes our Corps' honor. Misconduct can be prevented.

The Bathsheba Syndrome: Success as an Antecedent to Failure

Ludwig and Longenecker's Bathsheba Syndrome article focused on civilian corporate leadership. Before examining the key findings of the article, let's recall the story of David and Bathsheba in order to explore the role of Nathan as a reprover.

David was the youngest son of Jesse, chosen by God to be the King of Israel and Judah. As a boy, David was a shep-

Nathan admonishes King David. *(Photo from christianworker.us from an article written by Kerry Clark, "Nathan," 2011.)*

herd who courageously protected his sheep from predators and was a skilled musician who could soothe the souls of others. When David was a young teen, he defeated, with God's help, the giant Goliath. Subsequently, David was called into the service of King Saul who became ruthlessly jealous of David, especially after the King's son, Jonathan, befriended David and abdicated the kingship to David.

David was a man after God's own heart—upright, industrious, handsome, and brave, a war hero, and a natural born leader. The people loved David; his military would die for their King and the people of Israel prospered under his benevolent monarchy. However, David's success as a leader became a source of his failure. As Ludwig and Longenecker noted, David was a principled leader with a strong sense of moral discernment and came to power as a humble person, but something went very wrong.

Ludwig and Longenecker identified four lessons from the David and Bathsheba story found in II Samuel 11:

- *Personal and organizational success allows leaders to become complacent and lose strategic focus, diverting attention to things other than the management of their organizations.* When other kings were out to war, David stayed home and took his eyes off the strategic objective as a commander in chief and put his eyes on Bathsheba.
- *Success often leads to privileged access to information, people, and objects.* While David's army under Joab was fighting their nation's war, David directed his staff to inquire about Bathsheba. Knowing she was married to one of his warriors, David had her brought to him. David then committed adultery with Bathsheba, leading to her pregnancy.
- *Success often leads to unrestrained control of organizational resources.* David utilized his staff and resources to commit adultery with Bathsheba. He abused his authority as commander in chief to pull Uriah from the line, thinking that if Uriah went home from battle and slept with his wife, he would think he was the father of the child. Yet Uriah's loyalty to the King would not yield to David's cover-up and dishonest plan.
- *Success can inflate a leader's belief in his personal ability to manipulate or control outcomes.* When David's plan for Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba failed, David manipulated the battle plans and sent Uriah to the frontlines where he died in combat.

Nathan: David's Reprover

Who was Nathan and why is he a role model today? Nathan was a 10th-century B.C.–era prophet during the reigns of David and his son, Solomon. II Samuel 7 and 12; I Kings 1 and 4; and I Chronicles 2 and 29 describe Nathan and the role he performed in the life of Judah and Israel.

Nathan was in David's circle of trust as a trusted adviser, and when needed was a reprover of the King. Nathan had the nation and King's interests in mind at all times. Nathan was loyal and desired to see the nation thrive and David succeed. However, Nathan did not shirk from his responsibility to confront David when he committed wrongdoing with Bathsheba. Nathan demonstrated moral courage to confront the King. The following narrative from II Samuel 12 demonstrates how Nathan tactfully but directly reproved the King after David's adultery with Bathsheba:

> 1 So the LORD sent Nathan to David. When he arrived, he said to him: There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor.
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> 2 The rich man had a large number of sheep and cattle.
>
> 3 But the poor man had nothing except one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up, living with him and his children. It shared his meager food and drank from his cup; it slept in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him.
>
> 4 Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man could not bring himself to take one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for his guest.
>
> 5 David was infuriated with the man and said to Nathan: "As the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!

> 6 "Because he has done this thing and shown no pity, he must pay four lambs for that lamb."
>
> 7 Nathan replied to David, "Thou art the man!" (Authors' emphasis.)

This encounter between David and Nathan reveals insights into human nature and its propensity toward wrongdoing; we learn that good people can make very bad decisions that have devastating outcomes. Nathan was a valuable member of the King's leadership team; he was part of the commander's inner circle. Nathan performed the role of a trusted adviser to the commander, and when the King stepped over the line, he reproved the King. *A reprover is someone who strongly but quietly criticizes or corrects someone for the greater good of the individual and institution.* A reprover in a CO's trusted circle could be the executive officer, sergeant major, a mentor, a peer, a trusted friend, or other professional.

A Chaplain's Perspective: The Nathan Adviser (The Quiet Reprover)

Often there is the assumption that chaplains only provide religious ministry such as Divine services and prayers; however, chaplains perform a unique role organic to a command. Chaplains are religious ministry professionals (RMPs) with extensive education, experience, and core capabilities that support the commander to enhance force readiness. Also, as RMPs, chaplains support the commander as a competent staff officer. One of the chaplain's core capabilities and staff officer roles involves being a trusted adviser to the commander and command.

Chaplains serve as advisers to commanders, senior leaders, personnel, and their families. This advisement is extensive per *Secretary of the Navy Instruction 1730.10, Chaplain Advisement and Liaison* (Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, DC, 2009). Chaplains as RMPs respect the dignity and rights of those served and ensure that confidentiality, as defined in *Secretary of the Navy Instruction 1730.9, Confidential Communications to Chaplains* (Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, DC, 2008), is afforded to those they counsel and advise. Chaplains should be approachable and have direct access to the commander. The chaplain's role as a trusted adviser involves, but is not limited to, matters pertaining to religion, spirituality, spiritual fitness, moral and ethical decisionmaking, and the resolution of religious, moral, and ethical dilemmas. The commander potentially has a great asset in his command chaplain, and in order to fully utilize the chaplain, the commander can do the following:

- Establish a leadership environment where their circle of trust is strong but not impenetrable.
- Discuss with the chaplain his roles and responsibilities within the command based on Title 10, Secretary of the Navy Instructions, Marine Corps Orders, and Marine Corps doctrine.
- Empower a chaplain to be a reprover by simply saying, "Chaplain, I need your support. If you see me or a member of my command stepping over an immoral or unethical line, you will come to me in trust and confidence and I will listen to your advice and take action."

Chaplains serve as advisers to commanders, senior leaders, personnel, and their families.

Caveat 1. Not all chaplains operate at the same level of expertise, and for many junior battalion chaplains, this will be their first naval officer and chaplain assignments. Chaplains are qualified; they have the education, religious ministry experience, and endorsements of their religious organizations, but they need to be mentored to become more competent staff officers. Supervisory chaplains provide mentoring, training, and education to their subordinates; however, as an experienced leader, you can take advantage of mentoring and developing your chaplain as an RMP.

Caveat 2. If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is not true. Your chaplain should be a trusted adviser, but what happens when a commander is getting ready to step across the line of indiscretion and the chaplain goes to the commander as a reprover? Is the chaplain obligated to report this to higher authority? Chaplains have a burden to bear because they are bound by regulatory policy to keep confidential all matters pertaining to their advice and counsel to a commander. This does not mean the chaplain is a passive observer of a violation of law, and his silence is inaction; chaplains should remain on task to ensure the commander receives the support necessary to make a prudent decision while maintaining confidentiality.

A Lawyer's Perspective: The Nathan Obligation (Legal Requirements and Affirmative Obligations)

We are required to defer to our commanders and those above us in the chain of command. We follow their orders. We anticipate their requirements and attempt to fulfill them before being asked. We expect them to have the best interests of the Nation and their missions at heart, as well as the interests of their subordinates.

This is what makes any confrontation with a superior difficult, especially when one becomes aware of potential misconduct. We do not join the Service expecting to confront a situation in which a superior does something unwise, much less immoral or illegal. We join the military knowing we might come home broken, or not at all, but we do not expect, and have every right not to expect, to learn a superior has done wrong and then have to struggle with what to do about it.

Nevertheless, it happens. GEN Petraeus' resignation from the Central Intelligence Agency due to an extramarital affair, GEN William Ward's demotion to major general for using government resources for personal agendas, and BG Jeffrey Sinclair, currently pending general court-martial for several sexual misconduct–related charges are public examples of moral and ethical failure. It seems this list is perennially refreshed by senior officers and enlisted servicemembers who, after honorable careers without blemish,

commit misconduct worthy of relief and perhaps prosecution.

Many of these acts were witnessed or suspected by subordinates. Perhaps there was an officer who noticed that GEN Petraeus spent too much time with his biographer behind closed doors. Many staffers facilitated the personal dealings of GEN Ward and must have been aware that they were being used improperly.

It takes moral courage to challenge a superior, but what if one of GEN Ward's staffers had confronted him when he made the first personal requests? Would the general have reevaluated his conduct and decision? Could his career and reputation have been saved by a subordinate who reproved him? We cannot know the answer, but what we know is that a four-star general's misconduct was enabled by personnel who should have known better.[7]

The obligation to report misconduct arises under Navy Regulation 1137. The relevant portion of the regulation states, "Persons in the naval service shall report as soon as possible to superior authority all offenses under the Uniform Code of Military Justice which come under their observation."[8] This rule obligates each servicemember to report potential misconduct. Failure to comply subjects the observer of the offense to prosecution for failure to obey a lawful order or regulation. The regulation does not mention rank, either of the person directed to make the report or of the person suspected of committing the offense.

Exposing the potential wrongdoing of a senior servicemember takes honor, courage, and commitment, but it should not have to. Regulation 1137 relieves servicemembers of having to make a choice. It relieves us by imposing an affirmative obligation to report, regardless of rank, relationship between the offender and observer, or any consideration other than that an offense may have occurred.

The threshold obligating a report is low, and though the language of the regulation seems open to interpretation, it was interpreted by at least one court to compel the observer to report under many circumstances. The court interpreted "observation" to include awareness of an offense without requiring visual observation of the misconduct.[9]

Hopefully no commander will ever commit an offense; however, if a commander does, he should understand that a subordinate who becomes aware has no choice but to report it to that commander's superior. Ultimately we are sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution, not the men and women who lead us. Though we may be bound to superiors through respect, fear, admiration, or some combination thereof, we are required by law to report wrongdoing.

A misconduct report requires tact, discretion, and objectivity. Before reporting a potential offense, an individual should gain perspective by seeking the counsel of a trusted peer or mentor. If a question as to the motivation behind a report of misconduct arises, there is a possibility one might be perceived to be reporting vindictively. It would be best to seek out another person who would be in a better position to assess the situation. Unless one is above reproach, the counsel of a third party best serves an allegation of misconduct.

Many concerns will arise in the minds of those who know of a superior's misconduct: loyalty, retribution, trust, ostracism, and more. It is important to remember that when faced with these apprehensions, we must be loyal to more than those closest to us. We must be loyal to the Corps and our Nation. We must remember victims of misconduct who have not seen justice because their assailants were protected by someone who chose loyalty over integrity.

We must foremost understand that failure to report is a crime under Article 1137, for which each servicemember can be held liable. In a Nation in which the rule of law is the highest value, living up to the obligations of the article trumps all other considerations. After fighting so hard for the rule of law in Afghanistan and Iraq, the courage necessary to report misconduct should be easily found.

Before conduct reaches a level in which law must be invoked, it would be wise for commanders to seek counsel and be open to receiving guidance. Likewise, a Marine in the position of providing counsel to a superior must have the courage to be candid and persuasive. If a leader gives any indication that he will even come close to committing misconduct, that leader's counselors must not only raise the issue, but also have the fortitude and intelligence to make recommendations that are convincing.

In some ways, reminding a leader that he is being watched from above and below could be the best duty a subordinate can fulfill. Imagine if GEN Petraeus or GEN Ward had such advice—perhaps their names would still be associated solely with honor.

Conclusion: Training and Education in the Marine Corps on Values, Ethics, and Morals

The Marine Corps has an illustrious heritage in which "uncommon valor was a common virtue." Starting in boot camp or at Officer Candidates School,

Marines are taught values, ethics, morals, and decisionmaking. Recently the Commandant ordered that every Marine read *Marine Corps Warfare Publication 6–11, Leading Marines*, and *Marine Corps Reference Publication 6–11D, Sustaining the Transformation*, in order to "reawaken" our souls intellectually, physically, and morally so as to "refocus on our ethos and values," "a refocus on 'who we are' . . . and 'what we do.'"[10] [11] [12]

Another good doctrinal resource is *Marine Corps Reference Publication 6–11, Marine Corps Values*, which defines and describes the inculcation process of teaching core values from entry- to unit-level training.[13] In the introduction of *MCRP 6–11*, Gen Rusty Blackman makes the following comment:

> The Nation expects more of the Marine Corps than just success on the field of battle. America requires its Marines to represent her around the globe as a symbol of the might, resolve, and compassion of our great country. Feared by enemies, respected by allies, and loved by the American people, Marines are a "special breed." This reputation was gained through and is maintained in a set of enduring core values that form the bedrock and heart of our character.

Part of belonging to the Marine Corps Team involves incorporating the values of the team into the daily lives of its members. We understand and subscribe to our Corps' values: honor, courage, and commitment. There are other values that we honor as defenders of the Constitution: the ideals of democracy, fairness, faith, and freedom. These values and the basic concept of right and wrong are cornerstones in building Marines.[14]

Every generation needs to discover for themselves what they believe. Right and wrong do not change, but the moral and ethical complexity of the world has. All Marines must be trained and educated on how to make good decisions when faced with moral challenges.

Marines at every level should receive values, morals, and ethics instruction. Small unit leaders must be equipped to reinforce this education and training, especially in association with warfighting, such as the Law of Armed Conflict, trafficking in persons, and the many other moral and ethical issues faced in battle or in garrison.

Keeping our honor clean is not optional—it is our way of life. Being a Marine means always doing what is right. Ethical and moral education and training can strengthen moral resilience and warrior readiness. When Marines at all levels of leadership embody the values, ethics, morals, and character that the Marine Corps holds high, the probability of leadership failure due to personal misconduct can be eradicated.

>Authors' Note: The genesis of this article was an inspirational speech to senior Navy chaplains by RADM Margaret Grun Kibben, Chaplain of the Marine Corps. We are grateful for her moral, ethical, and spiritual leadership.

Notes

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