

The Delray Democrat

Trump Forces USMA Cadets to Return¹

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President Trump recently announced that he will travel to West Point to deliver a commencement speech to the cadets. Most people were outraged that Trump would force so many graduates to travel back to New York just to assuage his ego. Certainly, his action is medically and logistically recklessly foolish, intended only for his personal benefit, not the cadets. That said, I am glad the cadets get to see the current commander-in-chief. To the graduates – first and foremost, congratulations. This is the product of your hard work and dedication to duty. As you embark on your own careers, take a good hard look at the current President. This is everything a leader is not and should never be. This is everything that will make you fail as a leader in your own right. Take heed.

Most importantly, leaders always have and display character, including unquestioned integrity. There is no issue worth sacrificing your integrity and your career. Once you do, you never get it back. Throughout his term, Trump has displayed an astonishing and unacceptable lack of character and integrity. As of April 3, 2020, Trump has verifiably lied over 18,000 times. The Trump brand centers on a campaign of daily dishonesty to the American people. Leaders work with what they have and overcome challenges. They do not lie and hide from challenges.

It is crucial for leaders to care about their people and organizations. The primary objective is to accomplish the mission. To do that, you need to care about your people. Train them. Support them. Trust them. Enable them. Never sacrifice them, not needlessly. Praise them and give credit where earned. Take responsibility for all failures and deal with them privately. Whom do you blame? – yourself. Whom do you credit? – your people. Trump consistently rushes to the spotlight, takes personal credit for EVERY achievement, even those not belonging to him or his team. He immediately and visibly blames anyone and everyone for any negative, never accepting an ounce of responsibility. Trump's first thought is who he can throw under the bus. Trump's continuous self-promoting and self-aggrandizement is wholly unbecoming a leader. Leaders cannot bully and bullies cannot lead.

Leaders display a calm, professional demeanor. They never show emotion in public. In fact, it is wrong to scream at people even privately in your office. Leaders need to be able to adapt to a stressful environment, react to negative stimuli, or deal with any challenge while instilling a calm, confident atmosphere in the team. Leaders need their staff and trusted advisors to speak freely, even challenging the leader. Those discussions are healthy and produce better results. Once a decision is made, the staff comes together. Trump angrily lashes out at anyone who dares question him or his self-claimed achievements. He surrounds himself solely with shameless, incompetent

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sycophants who blindly follow him, even over a cliff. This is contrary to successful leadership.

Leaders recognize they often do not know everything. They must be prepared to learn. You learn by reading critical materials and being educated by the experts around you. Leaders build strong staffs that they empower, trust, and rely upon to help them make decisions and formulate priorities. It is not possible to do it all yourself, especially in a large complex organization. Trump eschews staff and prevents his staff from function other than as his punching bags. He refuses to read or learn; not only making him unprepared and incapable but placing the country at risk.

Leaders need to inspire others. They need to earn their trust, not absolute loyalty, even when it is not earned. The loyalty is to the organization and commitment to the mission, not blind fealty to a weak leader who chooses easy wrongs over difficult rights. Trump fails to set an example in all he does. The rampant financial and moral corruption in his administration is anathema to leadership and good governance. The American people should not tolerate it in their President or any leader. It should go without saying that leaders should not commit sexual assault or abuse others, engage in self-dealing under any circumstances, and should always set the highest ethical standards.

As a retired colonel, I had the privilege of leading teams of outstanding people and growing the future leaders. My mantra was “own it.” If you do something well or achieve a major milestone, be proud. Share and enjoy your accomplishments. If you make a mistake, admit it and learn and grow from it. There is no shame in making a mistake, only in making it worse. So, whatever you do, own it and move forward. Demand the best of yourself but tolerate something less than perfection from your team; just that they did their best, worked hard, and got the job done.