



## A Conversation on Leadership with General Colin Powell

by: Bill Appling

With all the anticipated changes from health care reform, I re-read an interview from General Colin Powell. I believe you will see how well it applies to what we are facing. I will highlight the major points he made in the interview. Some may seem a little rough, but I am quoting from a strong leader and former Chief of Staff of the United States Military.

1. "Being responsible sometimes means pissing people off."
2. "The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership."
3. "Don't be buffaloed by experts and elites. Experts often possess more data than judgment. Elites can become so inbred that they produce hemophiliacs who bleed to death as soon as they are nicked by the real world."
4. "Don't be afraid to challenge the pros, even in their own backyard."
5. "Never neglect details. When everyone's mind is dulled or distracted the leader must be doubly vigilant."
6. "You don't know what you can get away with until you try."
7. "Keep looking below surface appearances. Don't shrink from doing so just because you might not like what you find."
8. "Organization doesn't really accomplish anything. Plans don't accomplish anything, either. Theories of management don't much matter. Endeavors succeed or fail because of the people involved. Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds."
9. "Organization charts and hence titles count for next to nothing."
10. "Never let your ego get so close to your position that when your position goes, your ego goes with it."
11. "Fit no stereotypes. Don't chase the latest management fads. The situation dictates which approach best accomplishes the team's mission."
12. "Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier."
13. "Powell's Rules for Picking People - Look for intelligence and judgment and, most critically, a capacity to see around corners. Also look for loyalty, integrity, a high energy drive, a balanced ego and the drive to get things done."
14. "Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate and doubt, to offer a solution everybody can understand."
15. "Part I: Use the formula  $P = 40$  to  $70$ , in which  $P$  stands for the probability of success and the numbers indicate the percentage of information acquired. Part II: Once the information is in the  $40$  to  $70$  percent range, go with your gut."
16. "The commander in the field is always right and the rear echelon is wrong, unless proved otherwise."
17. "Have fun in your command. Don't always run at a breakneck pace. Take leave when you've earned it. Spend time with your families."
18. "Command is lonely."

I teach a class in the Masters in Health Care Administration program at the University of Memphis. I pass this out to my students on the first night of class. I also distribute it at most of the physician management retreats that I facilitate. I sure wish someone had given me a copy of it thirty years ago, before I stepped on all the land mines that I have stepped on.

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