

Leader Analysis Paper: Colin Powell

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Colin Powell was one of the most recognizable military and political figures in the mid and late 1980s and once he retired from service, was a great statesman. He was consistently the example of a successful military officer who was known to have a particular view on leadership. He came from a close-knit dual parent home where he had a network of uncle, aunts, and cousins to support his journey. His family was matriarchal, the women set the standards and raised the children while his uncles and father were the fun and saucy elements to his family (Powell & Persico, 2010). He looked up to his father the most who he felt unimposing in stature and somewhat a comedian. His father was the most popular and influential of the males in his family, known as prideful, supportive, respected, and the ringmaster of the family circle. Growing up he was neither a scholar or an athlete, he worked odd jobs through high school and attended church regularly with his family. His sister went to college at Buffalo State Teachers College so he figured that he should also give it a try. He ended up attending City College in New York and was introduced to the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) (Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute & United States Department of State, 2021). He felt like the military provided him purpose, discipline, structure, camaraderie, and direction (Powell & Persico, 2010). Colin Powell graduated college in 1958 and began his military career as a second lieutenant in the Army. He served his initial tour in Germany and when his three years ended, he decided to continue service. At the age of 24 (1961) he met a young lady on a blind date named Alma Johnson. Alma and Colin wed on August 25, 1962, and had three children, Michael, Linda, and Annemarie. Colin served as an Army soldier for 35 years and was able to amass the rank of Four-Star He commanded at the company, staff, brigade, division, and higher levels as he moved up in rank. Throughout his career of 35 years, he has participated in 28 conflicts, most notable

leading the Panama invasion and the Gulf War where he was the lead commander for Operation Desert Shield and deployed 250,000 US troops to Saudi Arabia. The victory in the Gulf boosted his popularity as well as the military's and the presidential administration's standing with the American public (Joint History Office of the CJCS, 2016). His leadership ability influenced change in the military, and he served as National Security advisor and Secretary of State for presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush respectively (Academy of Achievement, 2022).

Colin Powell was a multidimensional leader and an expert throughout his career who used leadership practices to motivate soldiers and lead the country into battle. He made a lasting impression on military leadership and modeled the way, he set examples throughout his career by winning competitions, commanding at all levels, and graduating in the top five percent or as distinguished graduate. Later in his career he developed his 13 leadership rules that illustrate his values that were derived from hard work, straight talk, respect for others, and thoughtful analysis (Center for executive excellence, 2013). The 13 leadership rules are, it ain't as bad as you think and it will look better in the morning, get mad then get over it, avoid having you ego so close to your position that when you position falls you ego goes with it, it can be done, be careful what you choose you may get it, don't let adverse facts stand in the way of a good decision, you cant make someone else's choices and you shouldn't let someone else make yours, check the small things, share credit, remain calm be kind, have a vision be demanding, don't take counsel of your fears of naysayers, and finally perpetual optimism is a force multiplier (Powell, 2012). Through his leadership rules he set the example and clarified his values. As a commanding general of a large division, it is imperative that he inspired a vision. Generals must speak with one voice of the highest ranking (Chief of Staff of the Army) and they must ensure everyone has a shared

understanding with messaging to the entire force. His role was to reaffirm diplomatic alliance, supporting missile defense, and encouraging sanctions on Iraq instead of force (Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute & United States Department of State, 2021). When America was under attack on September 11, 2001, Colin Powell as the Secretary of State had to inspire a shared vision of the Bush administration and support swift action in response. Although the claims of Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) was based on erroneous intelligence he breathed life into the vision through his emotional testimony to congress about the safety of American troops and the world if Saddam Hussein used WMDs in war. His rules number eleven and thirteen were have a vision be demanding and perpetual optimism is a force multiplier. These two rules explain that followers need to know where leaders are taking them and if the leader prepared the followers, then they will believe in the company, goal, or the mission. Challenging the process requires awareness of a problem and a willingness to fix the problem via a different method. Colin Powell was given numerous decisions to make throughout his career, many of which carried grave consequences if incorrectly executed. Rule number six and twelve, don't let adverse facts stand in the way of a good decision and don't take counsel from your fears or naysayers are helpful for challenging the process. Colin Powell as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) enabled others to act in his role, the CJCS provides messaging as the senior military official. He understood how leadership effects the welfare of the entire group therefore if the Air Force was thriving so should the Navy, Army, and Coast Guard.

Whether a world-wide crisis or a Corvette Colin Powell was known as a lifelong fixer of issues. He enabled others through stories or removing barriers to aid in success of the team. When President Bush was insistent about going into Iraq, against the will of the American People, NATO, and Congress, Colin Powell assured the President of support and was able to

make the war more palatable for everyone, later stating “What choice did I have, he was the President” (Draper, 2021). Loyalty to his leadership got the other leaders on board, convinced the people, and garnered support from Congress. Rules nine and ten, share the credit and remain calm be kind echo how his leadership style encourages the heart. Being kind in the face of mistakes can change the followers view of their leadership and make them appreciate attention to detail. As a young lieutenant in Germany, Colin was a new commander who was eager to impress his leadership, but he mistakenly left his pistol unsecured. All soldiers know that losing a weapon is a career killer, but his boss found it, returned the pistol, and told him a story to drive home the gravity of losing a sensitive item. He learned and used, “when they fall down, pick ‘em up, dust ‘em off, pat ‘em on the back, and move ‘em out” (Powell & Persico, 2010, p. 84) from early experience and adapted it into his leadership style. The Army is filled with firm leaders but a leader that can be kind is more respectable than an obtuse leader.

Since Colin Powell was born in 1937, he was a member of the Silent Generation. This generation grew up during World War II and the Great Depression and it’s assumed those challenges shaped their life and work ethic (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). As a military officer, he was charged with leading very young men and women into dangerous situations. He needed to set the example and guide teams to ensure that people return home safely to family and friends. During his time, leaders were great men or held certain characteristics, for example General George Patton, Franklin Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover were the standard bearers. They were leaders who got the job done in the face of adversity through with grit and determination and were heroes of their time. Colin Powell most likely was high on model the way, obviously he lived via his 13 rules of leadership which were short, yet powerful rules meant to assist leaders by managing emotions, modeling the behavior of others, and lead a team through

adversity (Center for executive excellence, 2013). Senior military officials also make certain that people support common values or a shared vision. We can speculate that his view changed on this section of model the way because when he initially joined the Army, the force was made up of conscripts but later moved to an all-volunteer force. Initially it was do as you are told, and many had to choose between service and jail; all that changed in the 1960s when ethical and transformational leadership was in the forefront. In the military, orders come down from above and usually leaders are high on inspiring a shared vision. He was motivating as a speaker or could speak with passion about the higher purpose of defeating Russia and preventing the spread of Communism. Commanders must report their metrics to higher headquarters sometimes daily, so he could describe how his organization was capable of accomplishing missions. Colin Powell was most likely to be low on encourage the heart and enable others to act. Once again, the generational characteristics of great men would not allow emotions and “men were men”. Dignity and respect were earned, it was not blanketed until you developed into a leader, just as Colin Powell earned respect by winning or placing high in any competition he joined. There was no room to allow followers to make decisions on their own, life in the Army profession was “my way or the highway” and no one cared about diverse points of view. Colin Powell recalls having a short fuse or quick temper. He was known for yelling as a young officer moving up the ranks and sometimes as a senior officer prior to the creation of his 13 rules. He recalls berating his peers so loudly and viciously that a senior officer took him to the side telling him “Don’t ever show your temper like that, it was demeaning to everyone” (Powell & Persico, 2010, p. 87) it was also placed in his efficiency report which could have negatively affected his potential for promotion. Later in his career and as a Statesman there was probably a shift in his thoughts on leadership due to generational changes in the workplace.

We can assume Colin Powell's personality type was extraverted, sensing, thinking, and judging (ESTJ). ESTJ's thrive on order, are joiners, outspoken, are ready to make tough calls, and typically stand firmly for their beliefs (Humanmetrics Inc., 2019). The Powell family was a colorful group of immigrants who brought their culture of family into Colin Powell. His stories of interactions fostered an extravert view of the world and showed how his family support system grew his personality. Traditions like holidays and birthdays were great gatherings, he was also a member of teams and societies that fostered his will to win and be successful. Colin Powell received his information in a sensing method, direct from information and not relying on imagination. His left and right limits were set by leaders above him, and he would have stuck to the method as closely as possible. He was more of a thinker than a feeler, in cases where decisions were made, he had to rely on intelligence gathered more often than a feeling on how things would happen. Rarely do military leaders go into dangerous situations without a plan of action, as most senior leaders say, "hope is not a plan of action". Colin began his journey blindly; he had no idea of what he wanted to do in life. His sister was college bound and he had some opportunities in the neighborhood but once he found his passion, then it became abundantly clear he used the judging criterion in his personality. A judging person organizes all life events and sticks to plans instead of improvisation and alternative routes to an end state (Humanmetrics Inc., 2019).

In closing, Colin Powell was viewed as an enormous figure referred to as larger than life who contributed to his country as a soldier, National Security Advisor, CJCS, and Statesman. A difficult feat, he was respected as a politician by both parties and eventually urged to run for president, which he declined. He believed in decency and earning respect by merit. He served in

the military during a time of massive changes. He witnessed the movement to an all-volunteer force and witnessed the integration of women into service. His leadership style was transformational, and he was a servant leader who put the American people in the forefront of his thoughts. He inspired world leaders and numerous followers, he took calculated risks and his leadership spanned more than 35 years and 28 different conflicts for the US Army, not to mention the Global War on Terror and the Iraq invasion as the Secretary of State.

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