

Stewardship in the Army and Stewarding the State

Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP)-1, The Army Profession, highlights recent efforts to provide clarity to the Army as a profession. A key component of that a profession involves stewardship. Stewards of the Army profession have two responsibilities; one of internally stewarding of the Army as an organization, and the other of externally stewarding the trust of the people of the nation. The U.S. Army is struggling with identifying what it truly means to be a steward in the Army profession. Stewarding the profession, from the Army's viewpoint, may reflect more on maintaining its existence and internal stewardship than on stewarding the trust of the people it serves.

Many Army leaders may not have thought about stewardship in relation to their profession. Leaders seeking understanding of this new doctrinal concept should examine some definitions of stewardship and how the concept applies to them as leaders. If the Army wants "stewards the profession" to become a competency embraced by the force, especially in a time of downsizing and budget constraints, it will require leaders to fully understand this concept and their responsibilities for it. In the Army, leaders will continue to come and go, but those who lead as stewards of the profession place the good of the nation above their own, thereby improving the organization and leaving the service better prepared for the future.

The American public puts great trust in military leaders to watch over the highly complex military system of systems. If we wish to maintain the trust of those we lead and those we serve, then we will need to do more than just teach leaders how to be stewards. Instilling stewarding leadership will involve a change of culture, policies, procedures, and resources to reinforce appropriate behavior. The public's trust and confidence in its Army is not negotiable.

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In June 2010 General Stanley McChrystal submitted his resignation as Commander, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Afghanistan. He resigned not because of a policy dispute, lack of competence, or differences in opinion on strategy with the president. No, he resigned because the president was going to fire him over remarks that both he and his staff made to a reporter, Michael Hastings, and were published in *The Rolling Stone* magazine. His comments and lack of professionalism in not policing or correcting the remarks of his staff showed a lack of respect for the elected and appointed political leadership and undermined the trust needed for effective civil-military relations.¹ In the president's own words, "It undermines the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system and it erodes the trust that's necessary for our team to work together to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan."² In this highly publicized incident, GEN McChrystal betrayed the trust of his superiors and showed a lapse in stewarding the profession.

Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP)-1,³ *The Army Profession*, highlights recent efforts to provide clarity to the Army as a profession. A key component of that involves stewardship. Stewards of the Army profession have two responsibilities; one of internally stewarding the Army as an organization, and the other of externally stewarding the trust of the people of the nation. The U.S. Army is struggling with identifying what it truly means to be a steward within our professional ethic. This paper will address some of that confusion.

We share the perspective of Colonel (ret) Anthony Hartle that the professional military ethic provides a framework or a foundation upon which to base moral decisions.⁴ Accepting the professional ethic indicates a commitment to a common set of values that is unique to the

profession and different from those of society in general. Yet, society allows the profession to exist within the values embraced by society. Part of the professional ethical obligation is the respect for the space society carves out for it. Society sees a need for a military. It provides space for the profession of arms to operate within society, allows it to set jurisdictions, to police itself, and to determine entrance requirements and other aspects related to a profession. Society does this, trusting that the military will accomplish missions towards outcomes that benefit society. Therefore, the professional ethic should include the obligation to steward this trusting relationship between the military and the civilian populace it serves.

As we examine what stewarding the profession might mean in the context of the U.S. Army, we look for a view of the profession in the foundational doctrine of Army Doctrine Publication (ADP)-1, *The Army*.⁵ This doctrine states that the Army is built on an ethos of trust which underpins the characteristics of military expertise, honorable service, esprit de corps, and stewardship. The document further states that stewardship reflects a professional obligation to the Army and to the nation. It is clear in the Army's doctrine and emerging work on the Army ethic that the Army officer who stewards the profession has a dual responsibility. However, the mechanisms and policies of the Army seem to reflect a focus more for the internal short-term good of the Army and not necessarily for the external long-term good of the nation.

Stewarding the profession, from the Army's viewpoint, may reflect more on maintaining its existence and internal stewardship than on stewarding the trust of the people it serves. The paradox is that the Army says it promotes stewardship, but it really is more narrowly promoting a stewardship of the Army. Specifically, we need to examine how the Army approaches the responsibility of stewardship. It may be that the Army's culture, policies, and procedures actually discourage stewardship in service to the nation, which is a clear indicator of how committed the

Army is to living up to its professed ethos. First, we need to examine the definition of stewardship from a more academic perspective.

What is Stewardship?

One can find several approaches to defining stewardship in civilian literature. Some concepts of stewardship involve an ethical or legal responsibility to another, much like a trustee. From this perspective, a steward is one who is trusted to look after or tend someone else's property, resources, or interests.⁶ Others take the approach from a psychological theory perspective, describing stewardship as members of an organization seeing greater long-term benefit in other-focused behaviors than in self-serving, short-term, opportunistic behaviors.⁷ This approach to stewardship indicates a sense of obligation to others based on the intention to uphold the trusted relationship between the parties involved. Stewardship can also extend to managing resources to ensure the sustainment of future generations.⁸ This concept of stewardship posits that people are entrusted with resources, and as trustees, must manage them so that their descendants will survive.

Inherent in most views of stewardship is the concept of trust between the steward and those with whom there is a stewarding relationship.⁹ Stewardship also involves the premise that the steward will act beneficially for the other parties involved. In a stewarding relationship there is trust that the steward will take into account the best interest of those with whom he or she interacts, and they in turn have confidence in the steward.¹⁰ This combination of trust and confidence is dependent upon the commitment of the steward to act appropriately. In an environment of stewardship, control mechanisms are not necessary and are perhaps even counter-productive since members of the organization place the collective interest above their

own.¹¹ A stewarding relationship hinges upon the mutual moral commitment that binds parties towards achieving a common goal. This social contract gives rise to a sense of moral obligation.

Organizational Stewardship

Organizational stewardship calls for an orientation that rises above personal interests. In the context of an organization, a steward needs to be aware of the trade-off between personal interests and organizational needs. The basic assumptions of stewardship are collaboration and cooperation within the organization, instead of infighting, competition, and contention, and of service to the organization instead of individual self-interest.¹² Stewardship acknowledges that what one has is enough, that more may not be forthcoming, and that people should broaden their horizons beyond self-oriented achievements. This does not mean to ignore personal goals. A leader practicing effective stewardship can help subordinates meet personal goals by working toward organizational, collective ends. Hence, the true opportunity for a steward is the realization that the benefits gained from pro-organizational behavior are higher than the benefits gained through individualistic, self-serving behavior.¹³ This perspective posits that the steward sees personal interests the same as those of the organization. As a consequence, the steward will work to promote the organization's well-being in conjunction with the welfare of its members.

Stewarding leaders focus on leaving a legacy,¹⁴ and they do it by developing subordinates and carefully shepherding resources and talents to provide the most good for the organization. Army doctrine indicates that all members of the profession should be stewards of the profession.¹⁵ To do this they should be motivated by internal values and beliefs aligned with those of the organization, as opposed to externally provided rewards and punishments which create a short term loyalty more to the reward than to the values.¹⁶ When stewards share the belief in developing individuals and the organization for the long term, there is a true alignment

of interests, supporting internal motivation. The emphasis on doing what is best for the organization over self is an attitude in which people tend to think in terms of “we” rather than “me.” Loyalty to the greater “we” of the organization over the lesser “me” of self is what provides an alignment of values, as well as collaboration and cooperation to accomplish the greater good. Officers in the Army swear allegiance to something larger than themselves, they swear allegiance to the Constitution and not to the president or to the Army.

Army Stewardship Challenges

In focusing on the Army we can look to their doctrinal publications, regulations, and policies for indicators of the service’s perspective on stewarding the profession. The Army’s keystone doctrinal publication, ADP-1,¹⁷ addresses stewardship as an essential characteristic of the profession. The Army’s perspective poses that stewardship is a key aspect of the relationship between the Army and the American people. This stewardship not only involves responsible use of the resources provided to the Army, but also stewardship of the relationship between the Army and the people it serves. Incorporating the concept of stewardship into the concepts and doctrine of the Army is admirable, but to discern if that is done effectively we must understand what role stewardship plays in our professional ethic. Army doctrine on stewardship is Army centric, paying less attention to the Army’s role of stewarding the nation’s trust. From an Army centric perspective, it is not clear if we can assume that the needs of the Army are the same as the needs of the nation.

According to ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*,¹⁸ the Army’s doctrinal publication for leadership, the leadership competency of stewardship of the profession involves improving the organization and its people, as well as the idea of accomplishing the long term mission of the

Army to fight and win the nation's wars, which is integral to stewarding the nation. Stewardship is a competency which incorporates several other competencies, such as creating a positive environment, self-improvement, and developing others. Although there are characteristics of stewardship throughout ADRP 6-22 (selfless service, oath to the nation, positive climate, developing others) the specific definition of stewardship is resource focused:

Stewardship is the group of strategies, policies, principles and beliefs that pertain to the purposeful management and sustainment of the resources, expertise and time-honored traditions and customs that make up the profession. Leaders acting as good stewards have concern for the lasting effects of their decisions about all of the resources they use and manage. Stewardship requires prioritization and sacrifice.¹⁹

The Army's leadership doctrine also states that, "Improving is an act of stewardship, striving to create effective, efficient organizations."²⁰ Part of improving the organization is establishing a climate for developing people and the organization with a long-term perspective.²¹ Developing leaders is an integral part of leaving a legacy for the Army so that it can continue to perform its mission of protecting and defending the country. Army leaders, as stewards of the Army profession, must place the needs of the Army as a whole above their organizational or personal needs. This is particularly true in developing subordinates. The Army expects all of its leaders to develop subordinates. One of the competencies in doctrine in the Army Leader Requirements Model is stewarding the profession.²² Being a stewarding leader involves improving the organization beyond the tenure of their current position. This means "taking action to manage people or resources when the benefits will not be seen during a leader's tour of duty within an organization."²³ Not only must Army professionals develop others, they must prepare

themselves to promote the long-term stewardship of the Army. This act requires a careful balance between the long-term needs of the Army, the mid-term needs of subordinates, and the immediate needs of achieving the mission, which may cause some conflict between the internal and external priorities of stewarding the profession.²⁴

Stewards should focus on organizational structures that empower instead of those that control. A steward is more interested in facilitating the growth of subordinates for the long-term, rather than controlling and keeping people in their place.²⁵ The military penchant for control is counterproductive to long term stewardship of the profession. The hierarchical, rank structured military readily accepts unequal distribution of power and is focused more on short term mission success and control of its units. Clearly, military leaders have the authority and responsibility to control their organizations. Control is essential for accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives. However, when members perceive excessive control they become less willing to commit to accomplishing organizational goals since they have less ownership and buy-in. Even though recent conflicts have resulted in the Army relinquishing many aspects of control to empower junior leaders, the culture is still very control oriented. The Army doctrine on mission command encourages disciplined initiative, using mission orders, and accepting prudent risk, all to empower subordinates to execute the mission within the commander's intent.²⁶ Yet as the forces return from operational deployments to duties back in garrison, unit climates are tending back toward centralization of control and away from the empowerment of leadership through the mission command philosophy.

As the Army transitions to a less operational environment, the policies for promotion are changing to reflect reduced force structure levels. The actions necessary for this reduction promote a more individualistic attitude, as previously masked OERs are open to review and

officer separation boards are an annual occurrence. Desire to remain part of the profession may encourage undesired internal competition, risk aversion, and resource conflicts as leaders compete for fewer slots. Young leaders competing in such an environment will face decisions for furthering their career that encourage selfish and self-centered behaviors, which run counter to good stewardship within the profession.

Culturally, the United States is more of a short-term oriented country. Short-term oriented cultures emphasize quick results and instant gratification, while long-term oriented cultures accept slow and steady activity to achieve results and are willing to subordinate their own personal desires for a long-term purpose or goal.²⁷ Frequent short-term deployments and rotation of commanders every two years exacerbate this cultural near-term focus in the military. The urgency of the short-term nature of the mission can override the long term benefits of taking care of the unit and the Army through professional development of its Soldiers. The 2012 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) showed that Army leaders ranked the competency of “develops others” much lower than all of the other Army leader core competencies.²⁸ It is hard for leaders to focus on goals five-to-ten years in the future when their deployment is for one year and they are going to another assignment at the end of the second year. It is hard for a commander to let outstanding officers attend professional military education, which will benefit that officer’s career and the Army in the long-term, but may hurt the unit when they are needed for the fight now. A five-to-ten-year time span translates to three-to-five assignments for an officer, leaving them far removed and not in a position to care about the legacy of their decisions made years ago.

Short-term mission focus can also engender toxic leadership. The Army has relieved several commanders over the past few years for behaviors that could be classified as toxic. Toxic

leaders focus on their self-interest and short-term mission accomplishment and are less concerned about morale or developing a learning organizational climate. They are perceived by their subordinates as self-serving and motivated by their own career progression.²⁹ Toxic leaders are successful in accomplishing the mission, but at a high cost to their subordinates. In a 2011 study by the Center for Army Leadership, only 13% of officers in the CASAL study indicated that toxic leadership was not a problem, leaving 87% who felt it was a problem. Even more concerning is that 39% indicated it was a serious problem.³⁰ The paradox of stewardship versus toxic leadership is that toxic leaders tend to get good short-term results from subordinates who are fearful of reprisals for poor performance. Toxic leaders also focus on their personal needs and the organization's short-term needs, to the detriment of the subordinates, to get the mission accomplished. This focus on achieving results reflects well on them and leads to their promotion. This reward reinforces negative behavior, both in their unit as their subordinates emulate this conduct to get promoted, and in their future units since this behavior has proven successful for them and others in the past.³¹

Separation from the People

Stewardship in large scale technical complex systems such as the military presents unique challenges. Today's military comprises a collection of complex technological systems and an intricate web of social and organizational relationships. As systems grow in complexity and technological sophistication, they can become further removed from the society they serve.³² The system becomes more self-perpetuating than subservient to the society it supports. This puts even greater pressure on military professionals to be stewards of the relationship with the nation they serve. As the nation becomes more reliant on experts with technical backgrounds to watch over military systems, it is possible to lose sight of how well the military is living up to its obligation

as stewards. What is lost is perhaps a sense of accountability. The very people the military swears to support may cease to hold the military profession accountable for the consequences of failure, while the military becomes more concerned about stewarding itself than the nation's trust.

Our nation enjoys a highly trained, professional military that has garnered the respect and gratitude of the people it serves. Nevertheless, in recent times this military has suffered defeats by more poorly equipped, less professional foes. Our military can brilliantly win battles and skirmishes, only to be less than successful in the larger strategic context, e.g. Lebanon, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan.³³ Perhaps the widening separation between the military and the public has disrupted the process of accountability from these events. Trying to hold highly trained and educated military professionals accountable for failures in their craft may represent substantial risks for limited gain to our elected representatives. Too often we see leaders quick to share the good news of successes by Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen, yet tend to not be so open about criticism of larger issues and poor operational judgment by senior leaders. Stewards of the relationship between the military and the nation should ensure their policies and actions reflect accountability, without the need for detail-focused external oversight.

The military breached the trust of the nation and defaulted in its stewardship of the nation in at least two ways. The first is in the way it handled sexual assault issues in the Army, and the second is demonstrated in the lack of support and the manner of dissent that some of its senior leaders exhibited for the elected political leadership. Sexual assault and misconduct charges are well publicized in the media, with charges filed against high ranking general officers all the way down to lower enlisted. Several members of Congress even wanted to step in and take away the military's ability to deal with such cases since so few were prosecuted and convicted.³⁴ GEN

(Ret) McChrystal exemplifies another type of breach of trust in his failure to police his staff in their criticism of the president and vice president, especially in front of a news reporter. This was also exemplified in the revolt of the generals during the Bush administration when quite a few retired generals expressed their displeasure over how the military was being treated, and in particular in how the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld was performing his job.³⁵ In at least these two areas, the external stewardship between civilians and the military has created a lack of trust and shown a lack of stewardship.

The all-volunteer Army has further exacerbated a separation between the people of the nation and the military. As fewer members of society actually serve in the military, the people of the country become more and more disconnected with their Army. Less than 1% of Americans serve in uniform for the armed forces. As the saying went in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army is at war while America is at Walmart. There is definitely less connection with today's professional Army than the conscripted citizen-Soldier Army of years past.³⁶ Unless leaders invest in developing subordinates to be good stewards in service to the nation, the armed services could evolve to the point they may not best serve the interests of the people of the United States.

Assessing Who to Keep

There are some distinct issues with stewards in the military which are not the same in other professions. The Army has an up or out policy where Soldiers cannot stay at the same rank for an extended period of time. The rank structure is a pyramid and as each new promotion gate is reached, not everyone makes it through. Those who are not promoted are eventually forced out of the service. This poses some problems for a stewarding leader who wants to develop their subordinates.

The Army does not have the luxury of determining how many Soldiers it receives or how big a budget it gets. The Army has input, but it is the civilian, politically elected leadership who decides. For instance, in 1992 the Army stood at about 772,000 Soldiers. Due to the “peace dividend” from the Soviet Union breaking up, Congress and the president decided to reduce the Army to 489,000 active duty Soldiers - a 283,000 person reduction in the force.³⁷ About one out of three Soldiers were told to leave the Army. This type of action is being replayed, although not quite as drastically, as the Army faces another force drawdown, sequestration, and looming inter-service budget battles. These actions create tension within the stewarding leader as the external responsibility to let people go conflicts with the internal responsibility to develop and shepherd resources, which includes taking care of people.

A stewarding leader who focuses on his own organization and developing his own people will have a difficult time discharging many of the very subordinates he is responsible to steward. As officers rate their subordinates, Officer Evaluation Reports (OERs) consistently become inflated because raters are trying to take care of their own people, as an internally focused steward would. A leader who stewards the profession, however, will understand the need to keep the best Soldiers in the Army. As a steward who develops subordinates to take positions of higher responsibility, and who works with subordinates to teach them to eventually take over his job, there is a knowledge that not all of his subordinates can or will get promoted. A steward of the profession has the responsibility to accurately rate subordinates so that only the best will get promoted, knowing that some will be discharged from the Army through the steward’s actions. This involves a distinct mindset of putting the needs of the larger organization above those of self or subordinates. This aspect diverges from the responsibility to develop subordinates. In fact, it becomes the exact opposite of developing subordinates. It is the responsibility to terminate

employment, which on the surface appears not to be a stewarding action, especially from the individual's perspective who is getting fired. It becomes a conflict between external and internal stewarding.

Competitive promotions and the drawdown create quite a dilemma facing the stewarding leader. The policies of the Army may inhibit stewardship, or at a minimum not reinforce it, requiring the Army to make some significant changes to accommodate the ideas it is espousing. An important aspect for the way forward is to have the Army relook its system of rewards and promotions to ensure that stewards of the profession are promoted and allowed to continue serving. The rewards of the organization need to be aligned with its espoused values. For example, the Army recently implemented a new OER. One of the categories on the OER is how well the officer develops people and the organization with a long-term perspective (DA PAM 623-3).³⁸ A sub-element of this category is to evaluate whether the officer acts as a steward of the profession. However, the criteria for this assessment is lacking, only referring to how the officer makes choices that ensure the Army is capable of performing its core functions.

One could view the Army focusing on its unique functions as roughly parallel to an individual focusing on personal achievements rather than service to a higher entity. This runs counter to most of the thinking and writing about stewardship we see in our Army doctrine. On the other hand, we do see reference in the OER policy to putting the welfare of the nation in the Army's value of selfless service. However, the preponderance of the evaluation is on performance and potential for promotion. Evaluations are used by promotion boards and assignment managers. All of this presents a challenge to stewards of the profession who must balance the need to pick competent leaders of the profession with the need to foster member efforts towards long-term goals of service to the nation.

Not only do Army leaders need to compete internally with their peers for quality evaluations by superiors, they will also have to compete for their job. The Army is reducing its force and promotion rates are returning to more historic levels, causing competition for positions. When the true steward competes with someone who is out for themselves, the steward is much less likely to be retained and promoted. Stewards tend to give credit to others and sacrifice their own personal agenda for the good of the organization. The implementation of Army policies and procedures may eliminate humble stewards who look to give credit to others, even though doctrine is now espousing that leaders should have stewardship as a competency. The system creates a lack of alignment of promotions with espoused values.

The Way Ahead

The military is in the business of leadership at the point of death. Our leaders lead men and women into combat against a thinking and deadly enemy. Employees of most professions do not have this added dimension of service in the face of grave danger. It takes more than monetary incentive to achieve the type of dedication, service, and commitment required to successfully serve in the military. Rather, many who serve will accept some level of personal sacrifice to be involved in something bigger than themselves. Military members swear an oath of allegiance to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. This act formalizes the relationship as subservient to the people of the United States, putting the interests of the nation ahead of personal interests. The military is charged to be a steward of all granted to it by the people of the United States. The public expects faithful stewards and the military has a responsibility to be those stewards.

In the Army leaders will continue to come and go, but those who lead as stewards of the profession place the good of the nation above their own, thereby improving the organization and leaving the service better prepared for the future. They have a higher calling than preserving just the individual or just the organization, they have the obligation to serve and protect the nation by fighting and winning its wars. Unlike businessmen answering to their stockholders, the military answers to the people of the United States. Stewards must be motivated intrinsically and see their position as a calling more than a career or a job. The public's trust and confidence in its Army is not negotiable. Leaders must have the competence and commitment to be effective stewards of their profession and to live up to the ethic of the profession. They must rise to the challenge of how to create a culture within the profession that recognizes and rewards stewardship in service to the nation. If the distance between our profession and the people it serves is widening, making it more difficult for the people to enforce accountability, our obligation is to hold ourselves accountable. Perhaps it is time to renew our approach to stewarding our profession and maintaining our ethic of service to the nation, as exemplified in previous centuries.

“No other profession holds out to the worthy so certain a reward for intelligence and fidelity, no people on earth so generously and willingly accord to the soldier the exalted praise for heroic conduct in action, or for long and faithful service, as do the people of the United States; nor does any other people so overwhelmingly cast away those who fail at the critical moment, or who betray their trusts.”

General William T. Sherman speaking to the first class of officers and Soldiers of the School of Application at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, October 25, 1882.

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