

LEADERS in Action

Jason Womack interviews COLONEL J. WILLIAM “BILL” DEMARCO (Ret.)



Col. Joseph William DeMarco (Ret.) had a 28 year career in the United States Air Force. Col. DeMarco holds three masters degrees in Military Arts and Science, American Military University, VA, Military Operational Art and Science, Air University, AL, and Airpower Art and Science from the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, Maxwell AFB, AL. He understands effective leadership, developing leaders, and continually learning from others.

Q&A

Jason Womack: *Do you have a simple way to think about how leaders get better?*

Colonel DeMarco: Leonardo daVinci once said “simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” There are two things I know I need to do as a leader; both are simple to understand, yet complex or quite sophisticated in implementation.

Understand that we need to improve. In the Air Force it’s possible to believe leadership is dependent upon a position. Someone who has positional authority does not automatically make them a strong leader. I make a point to let people know that I’m continuing to grow, to study, to learn, to talk to people like you. Another leadership guy, Andy Christiansen of High Capacity Leaders in Atlanta GA, once asked me to help him look at some military leadership issues, and in answering some of his questions, I think I’ve actually learned more from him!

We need to learn more about our own leadership style. There’s a lot of debate out there on what to work on, our strengths or our weaknesses. I interact with a lot of younger people, and I encourage them to really understand themselves, to understand both their strengths AND their weaknesses. When people understand themselves - their motivations and goals - more, it gives them thrust AND vector; it gives them the energy they need AND something to focus on.

JW: *What was your Defining Moment as a leader?*

Colonel DeMarco: I have a very strong memory of how 9/11 attacks changed everything for me, my family and my larger community. That morning I was out for a run, I came home and when I got out of the shower my sister-in-law called to tell me to “turn on the news.” When the second plane hit the World Trade Center I turned to my wife and said, “We’re at war.” She asked, “With who?” I replied, “I have no idea.”

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Q&A with COLONEL DeMarco

Leadership is more than just a word to Colonel Joseph William DeMarco. It is a way of life.

Colonel DeMarco has pushed to understand effective leadership, develop leaders, and (continually) learn from others.

Over the next 100 days I was deployed halfway across the world, and flew one of the first sorties in combat [he flew a KC-10 tanker, re-fueling fighter jets in the air] over the desert.

During that time I reflected back on something I learned as a cadet at The Citadel. When I was a freshman, one of the seniors told me, “The most important people in your LIFE are your classmates.” I had no idea how right he was. So, now I tell people: the most important people are your peers. The second most important, your direct reports, you need to take care of those guys. The third...Your boss.”

I learned who I could count on to get the job done.

JW: *What will leaders increasingly need to include that up until now they may not have had to study in great detail?*

Colonel DeMarco: Start thinking about how you serve as a role model. Leaders who want to connect with the next generation have to make understanding social media a priority, they need to jump in and become social media competent. I've been researching how we're communicating and collaborating and find there are three groups: The Tourists (they know it exists, drop in, and then leave). The Natives (they were born and exist online), and the Citizens (they understand how social media and connect well there). The problem is—natives tend to avoid tourists who don't care enough to learn their language or understand their culture.

Our young people are using Social Media to connect and learn about how the world works; as role models — as leaders — we have an opportunity to connect with them in many new ways and social media is their venue of choice...we need to join them there.

JW: *What are some of your own habits or routines as an effective leader?*

Colonel DeMarco: I am at my best when I'm able to do my morning routines:

- My wife and I get up at oh-dark-thirty and go to the gym together.
- Over breakfast (the most important meal of the day), I read the news, gaining an understanding of the world.
- I get in to the office about 30 minutes before anyone else (I told the staff not to come in before me!) and that's my time for reading the Bible or devotional time.

By the time I start my day, I've engaged in mental, physical, and spiritual fitness.

JW: *How would you define your self in just one sentence?*

Colonel DeMarco: I am a leader in continual Beta.

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