

Appropriate for all leaders
by Colonel William J. Shirey, United States Air Force (Ret.)

“No one from the east or the west, or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another” (Psalm 75:6-7).

Congratulations! God has exalted you for command. What a privilege to lead men and women in the defense of our nation. The following TTPs are humbly offered with the hope and prayer that something included might help you bring glory to our Lord as you serve.

- **Pray for wisdom.** Your leadership will affect lives. The Bible tells us, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). Don’t miss out on this indispensable asset for your kit bag. We all need it!
- **Make quiet reflection alone each day a priority.** It allows you time to think, pray, read the Bible, and hear God speaking to you. Leadership requires time to think and plan. Your command is part of your ministry. Discipline yourself to have quiet times each day, no matter how busy you are.
- **Be competent in your profession and give God the glory.** David, one of the greatest warrior-leaders of all time, provides us an outstanding example in Psalm 144:1, “Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle.” David demonstrated excellence as a warrior and glorified God in the process.
- **Let those you lead know early on that you are a Christian.** You can do this in several ways. Symbols in your office can reflect your faith, but your words and actions will make your Christian character evident to all over time.
- **Expect persecution.** Jesus warns of this possibility in Matthew 5:11-12; “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
- **Seek accountability from a peer.** You’ll need to seek this kind of relationship. No one will come up to you and ask if they can hold you accountable! If at all possible, try to select someone who sees you daily and can tell you when you’ve blown it. Proverbs 27:17 tells us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” If you’re serious about being at your best, this is a must.
- **Don’t hesitate to seek counsel.** Even though you are the commander, you don’t have all the answers and should not be shy about seeking sound advice. “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure” (Prov. 11:14). Incidentally, in case you are a little shy in this area, most people consider it a compliment when you ask their advice.
- **Seek balance in being “salt and light” in the world, without being “of the world.”** Jesus charged the disciples to be the “salt of the earth” and to let their lights “shine before men” (Matt. 5:13-16). However, John cautions us in 1 John 2:15 to, “...not love the world or the things in the world.” John goes on to describe more specifically those things he is referring to. “...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16 NASB). Avoid these areas; but don’t isolate yourself so that you are no earthly good. Those under your command need to see your light. Don’t get trapped in the office. We lead people, not things.
- **Do what is right and leave the results to God.** You may be confronted with decisions that will cause you to ponder the ramifications they may have on your career. Do what’s right before God, and let Him worry about the ramifications. Your motives are an important aspect of your character. I’ve found it helpful to pray through Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

- **Watch out for pride.** Many a commander has been caught up in his success and been trapped by the things of this world as described in 1 John 5:16 above. Satan is subtle in his attacks. Proverbs warns that, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). It’s difficult to be proud when you are spending lots of time on your knees in humility before God.
- **Let people see the joy you have in Jesus Christ.** There will be times when you will feel tired and discouraged. However, unlike happiness, our joy does not come from circumstances, but from Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us to, “Rejoice in the Lord always...” (Phil. 4:4). Don’t let circumstances steal your joy. Your testimony in the midst of adverse circumstances may be what draws another to Jesus Christ. We’re also told in the Bible to, “Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Remember, it is a privilege, and should be a joy, to influence other lives through your leadership. Your time in command will go all too quickly. In the midst of the long hours and hard work, don’t forget to stop occasionally to reflect on the great blessing you have of experiencing command. You have been exalted for such a time as this. Good luck...may God work in a mighty way through you for His glory!

Adapted from remarks originally presented on 17 May 1999 to a group of Christian officers attending Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

BIO:

William J. (Joe) Shirey, (Colonel, USAF, retired), was commissioned from the Air Force Academy in 1976. He was an F-16 Squadron Commander and served in various staff assignments in NATO, the Pentagon and Air Combat Command. He retired in 2001. He and his wife, Johanna, have four daughters: Sarah, Katie, Rebecca, Emily. They have been actively involved in OCF and other military ministries since entering the service.