LEADERSHIP SPEECH

FOR

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Hello everyone! Thank you for taking the time to be here today. To all of the cadets present, welcome to the opportunity to learn more about what it takes to be a leader. It’s the wise young person that acts as a sponge; one that is willing to absorb the information and signals all around and to digest, condense and take informed action. The truth is that the world really is your classroom-and ours too, and the more you are open to listening and learning, the more refined will be your decision making skills and future actions. To all of the parents and family members who are here in support of our cadets, welcome. Thank you for all that you’ve done to inspire and guide our students. For all of the faculty, cadres, and university administrators here today, thank you for your support as well. Often the earliest examples of leadership in a child and young adult’s formative years are found in the influential adults in their lives, and of course that would primarily include parents and teachers. Although you, the faculty members who are here today, interact closely with our students, we cannot underestimate the role of education and guidance in the forming and nurturing of the next generation of leaders. In the early stages, influencers work to build foundations. In young adults, the message has to be refined, clarified, and best practices must be reinforced.

We have a great group of cadets at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ University’s ROTC program and you, our students are at a critical juncture. You’re at a stage in your lives and career development when distinctions are demanded and choices must be made. To declare oneself to be in the ROTC program tells us a lot about you. We know you have expressed the desire and the determination to be leaders. Now it’s time to begin to understand what that truly means, what is expected of you, what to demand of yourself, and how to identify the means and path to your most profound contributions to the military and to society.

General Colin Powell has said, “If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters. Excellence is not an exception, it is a prevailing attitude.” One way of achieving and reinforcing the “habit” of excellence is through understanding and appreciating the distinction in meaning and function. For instance, what is the difference between a manager and a leader? In the simplest of terms, it’s been said that a leader rallies people around a vision, while a manager works to carry out the vision. Let’s face it; there can be no leaders without managers and “ground forces.” It’s essential that leaders know how to manage. Remember excellence is a prevailing attitude and it’s one that includes knowledge from as many vantage points as possible. Today we want to speak to the leader in each one of you.

What are some of the most important qualities of leadership? According to Forbes Magazine, an effective leader possesses intelligence, the ability to delegate, honesty and integrity, great communication skills, a sense of humor, commitment, confidence, creativity, intuition, a positive attitude and the ability to inspire. So how does one get from here to there? President Dwight Eisenhower said, “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.” … Or as the old New York joke goes, there were 2 people standing on the corner of Broadway and 56th Street, and the one that seemed to be lost turned to the other and said, “How do I get to that famous concert theater, Carnegie Hall?” and the other person replied, “Practice.” (**Wait for the laugh**). That’s the secret of life. Practice. Over and over and over until you have sharpened your skill set to the “nth” degree. Allow yourselves to learn. Surround yourselves with the best and you will be the best.

There have been some great leaders for us to observe-some famous and obvious, others a little quieter but no less brave and effective. Abraham Lincoln was considered a great leader. We’ve learned of his legend and his tragic death, but what are some of the characteristics he possessed and demonstrated that made him so admired? Doris Kearns Goodwin, the historian and author has done extensive research on Lincoln. In her opinion, some of his strengths were his ability to listen and empathize with different points of view, his determination to learn on the job, his ability to share both credit for success and blame for failure, he was able to control his emotions, and he was determined to adhere to fundamental goals…. in other words, he was focused, compassionate, considerate and naturally intelligent. It’s been summed up that “His greatness consisted of the ‘integrity of his character and moral fiber of his being.’” Think about it-what more could anyone look for in a leader?

General Omar Bradley was one of the great leaders of World War II. Although as a young man he began working as a boilermaker, it wasn’t long before a Sunday school teacher encouraged him to take the entrance exam for West Point. As a graduate of the Class of 1915, he was among the group called, “The class the stars fell upon,” as it’s been observed that his graduating class produced fifty-nine generals!! Isn’t THAT something to aspire to!! He was steadfast in his military training and career and of course, made his mark with his service in “The Great War.” By 1938 he was serving directly under General George Marshall and although he served under General Patton, he eventually became his supervisor. By the end of the war, his command numbered 1.3 million, the largest to serve under one person. Talk about leadership!! You can just imagine the focus, drive, vision and determination this man possessed. It’s incredible to imagine, but what an inspiration he is!

I hope I’ve given each one of you some food for thought. I find true inspiration in you cadets as you show the enthusiasm and willingness to learn and be molded into great military leaders. I can’t think of a greater honor than to demonstrate your dedication to your country by being the best Army officer you can be. It takes vision and commitment to select this program and to stay on course and it is an even greater honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to lead and inspire those who follow you. As you learn and train, so will you teach, and as in the example of General Bradley, your ultimate destination and impact is only as limited as your willingness. To be an Army officer is to suspend your theories of limitations and to realize your plans and achieve your goals in the name of honesty, integrity, determination and purpose. Thank you!