

If you want to learn about leadership, ask an experienced leader. Gen Stephen R. Lorenz, who retired as commander of Air Education and Training Command, has made the task accessible by giving us a collection of articles he wrote on the subject. General Lorenz started out like many graduates of the Air Force Academy with a heightened sense of leadership, one gleaned from watching and learning from leaders in classes, in the dorms, and on the parade grounds. Then, as now, he also had the opportunity to learn from a wide variety of important civilian and military leaders who visited the Academy.

Even as a lieutenant, General Lorenz developed a habitual practice of keeping a log of his activities in journals and scrapbooks. He thought about the styles of different leaders and found it satisfying to write about leadership at different points in his life, recognizing that the concept of leadership had different faces. He found that some practices are universally applicable, while some depend on the situation as well as the age and maturity of those being led. All this gave him insights into his own leadership style and fed his knowledge about the foundations of leadership.

As his writings on the subject grew into a sizeable collection over the years, General Lorenz not only found audiences that appreciated what he offered about leadership, but he began to see a set of standard principles that had useful effect in a wide range of conditions. Some examples that are well presented in this study include the point of “Balancing Shortfalls.” It is a recognized principle that leaders never go to war with the resources they think they need—they must balance their shortfalls and show their staff and warriors that they can go forward anyway.

General Lorenz recognized that one of the toughest jobs commanders face is preparing their people to accept a new tasking. They have to find the resources to carry out the task, which means more work for everyone. Thus, while it is difficult to accept a new tasking because of the additional work involved, they find that people will work harder if the importance of the job is shared with the workers.

Many audiences found General Lorenz an engaging speaker. He commonly used popular subjects, even videos of Homer Simpson, to carry the message. Leaders must recognize the need to communicate to the sensitivities of their audience. He also reminds us to take our jobs, but not ourselves, seriously.

Nothing speaks better to the subject of effective leadership than the need to develop professionally. General Lorenz believes that leadership is tied to a continuing study of the profession, thus the need for leaders to read. He particularly advocates reading biographies of great leaders. He found that learning from other’s experiences helped keep him from wasting time reinventing the wheel. And reading, like any other leadership development, is a lifetime experience because, as he describes it, “Life is a marathon, not a 50-yard dash.”



John A. Shaud, PhD
General, USAF, Retired
Director, Air Force Research Institute

[Download eBook](#)