



# ON LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP

BY RICHARD CARMONA

It has been stated repeatedly that we stand on the shoulders and walk in the shadows of our predecessors who paved the way for us. Nowhere is that metaphor more applicable than in the NTOA. Although our founders and leaders who built the NTOA are extraordinarily diverse, what identifies and unites them is their common commitment to a single set of values that define servant or selfless leadership.

Recent articles in *The Tactical Edge* by an exemplary leader, Phil Hansen, paying tribute to other exceptional leaders like Keith Frakes and Sid Heal, reminded me of these and other great friends and legendary leaders, whose paths in life led the way in their departments and helped to shape the NTOA. As the NTOA embraces its 40th anniversary, stronger than ever with continuous refreshment by new, young members globally, it is appropriate to thank many of our foundational predecessors, while reviewing the common values of their leadership.

One of the most iconic leaders of all was our NTOA founder John Kolman, who partnered with his wife Janice in the early 1980s to democratize an innovative concept

of uniting all law-enforcement special operations teams nationally. Their goal was to work together to crowd-source information and develop national standards and training programs to enhance performance and reduce tactical risk through best practices. John is a former U.S. Army soldier and a retired Los Angeles County sheriff's captain, who is often credited with being one of the founding fathers of modern SWAT. From their garage in Whittier, California, he and Janice began the arduous task of building a potential membership list of individuals and teams.

By 1983 they had amassed a critical number of diverse operators and law enforcement teams and in 1984, hosted the first NTOA Tactical Conference, cohosted by Albuquerque PD in New Mexico. This began the 40-year tradition of rotating NTOA tactical conferences between many U.S. cities, police, and sheriff's departments that had the ability and resources to cohost the ever-increasingly complex and larger and larger annual events.

Other founding members like Mike Hillman and Ron McCarthy provided leadership to the NTOA as board members and/or instructors over several decades. Although

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each is unique, they all possess the common values of true leadership, which are essential to all well-functioning tactical teams and organizations that expect to grow, be sustained, and be perceived as credible and potentially influential. Due to the vision of John and Janice Kolman and the dedication of the foundational leaders and those who followed over four decades, the NTOA has become the undisputed national repository of diverse tactical thought leaders and the promulgator of the evolution of best practices in law enforcement tactical operations. From defining mission types to training, tactical emergency medical support, evolving technology, air operations, tactical negotiations, technical and scientific innovation, and the publication of *The Tactical Edge*, we, the NTOA, and its leaders continue to lead the way in a world of ever-evolving “all hazards” threats.

As we reflect on our foundational leaders and the leadership qualities that have allowed the NTOA and their respective departments to thrive, we can easily identify a common set of leadership values. Not only are these values common to law enforcement but they also are an integral part of military organizations and their service academies, as well as noncommissioned and commissioned officer uniformed service leadership training.

Much has been written about leadership and defining what a leader is. Simply stated, a leader is responsible for the destiny of others. Whether a young police officer in charge of a shift, a senior police commander or a military general or admiral, the values of leadership are identical; all that changes are the scope and scale of your leadership. As a leader, you must lead selflessly and realize that your words, presence and actions can and will inspire those you have the privilege to lead. An important aspect of leadership is that leaders inspire others to achieve more than was thought possible.

An old axiom of leadership holds that after you achieve leadership, if you have to continue telling people you are the leader, then you are not the leader, for you haven’t earned the right to lead. The “sine qua non” of leadership is integrity. Simply defined, it’s doing the right thing even though no one is watching. Your teammates are always watching you, their leader. You must lead by example at all times in order to earn your title and the respect of those you lead. Persons given the opportunity to lead and do so via intimidation, fear or coercion generally fail, for their subordinates are not inspired to follow or emulate them.

The earned privilege of leadership also includes the responsibilities of mentorship or preparing the pipeline of future leaders and stewardship of the unit and the department’s “brand” along with mastering internal and external communications. In this day and age of repeated challenges to police integrity and community support, the “brand” or reputation of a SWAT team and department must always be at the leader’s forefront in order to enhance professional performance and retain community support.

Leaders also must have a clearly articulated vision and mission clarity, for if you don’t know where you are going you will never get there. Leaders recognize that it’s never about them but all about building and strengthening the team. A leader is best when people barely know he or she exists, for when the work is done, the mission completed, they will say, “We did it ourselves.”

Leadership may be the most important societal privilege that one may achieve. The best leaders are transformational through their inspiration, wisdom, selflessness, passion and charisma.

At the NTOA and through its diverse member leaders, we have become not only special operations force multipliers but also the undisputed convener of tactical thought leaders advancing best practices nationally and globally. A leader is one who inspires us to be all we can be. The NTOA is home to selfless leaders and our nation is better for it.

### **About the author**



Dr. Richard Carmona retired as a highly decorated Pima County Deputy Sheriff and SWAT team leader with 35 years of service as well as additional leadership experience and service as a U. S. Army Special Forces combat decorated operator and eventually becoming the U.S. Surgeon General. He is also a TEMS founder and the NTOA Section Chair Emeritus.

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