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## GROW LEADERS : PLANT A SEED OF SUCCESS

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### JCSP 44

#### *Exercise Solo Flight*

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**GROW LEADERS : PLANT A SEED OF SUCCESS**

By Major Crystal Boutilier

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## **GROW LEADERS : PLANT A SEED OF SUCCESS**

*Think twice before you speak, because your words and influence will plant the seed of either success or failure in the mind of another.*

– Napoleon Hill

### **INTRODUCTION**

If you plant a seed and nurture it, a plant will grow. How do leaders plant seeds to grow leaders of tomorrow? Despite the positive measures to attract and recruit, retaining personnel initially drawn to a military career in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has proven to be a difficult task. Through increased personnel support and newly advertised benefits, results from the many studies, surveys, and retention strategies explored, the challenge still remains. How does an organization foster commitment from voluntary participants?

With decades of research demonstrating that nurturing increases organizational commitment, the most effective leaders mend and tend, or ask and inspire, rather than command and control. No longer are the days to commonly view leadership as a process wherein leaders influence followers to believe it is in their best interest to cooperate in achieving a shared task objective. Being an authentic leader, and doing it with compassion, trust, commitment, care, and warmth will retain talent in the CAF. In other words, capturing people's hearts rather than commanding their hands will sustain organizational excellence.

Ultimately, this essay provides the underpinning notion that the military leader is responsible to develop and retain talent in the CAF. By examining specific aspects of leadership using a gardening metaphor for the organization, this essay will feed a new understanding for the military leader. By demonstrating the similarities between the tasks of a gardener and the responsibilities expected of a leader, one can establish that there is a significant leadership role to play in order to retain talent in the CAF.

Historically, the “trait theory” of leadership, or what was called “The Great Man Theory” from a misogynist perspective, was the quest for the illusive characteristic that predicted who among those who became leaders were effective. This essay does not claim that the capability to be a master gardener (or effective leader) is a type of certification (or intelligence). In application, this essay suggests a holistic approach to plant seeds of success to grow and retain military leaders of tomorrow.

Although some individuals seem to be born with a ‘green thumb’, more learn what works best in their garden through trial and error. For the CAF to succeed, a positive space must be provided to develop leaders similar to gardeners growing seeds from the bottom up in a healthy stable environment. Table 1 further associates gardening in a military context and outlines the concepts explored in this essay.

**Table 1 – Gardening Metaphor for the Organization**

<b>GARDENING</b>	<b>MILITARY</b>
Garden	Organization
Gardener	Leader
<b>PLANTING</b>	
Time Commitment	Invest in People
Prepare Soil	Healthy Work Environment
Spacing	Compartmentalize & Focus
Recognize Plant Stress	Workplace Stress
<b>NURTURING</b>	
Plant Growth & Development	Develop Leaders
Remove Impediments	Shaping Behaviour
Strong Roots	Patience & Foundation
Sunlight	Opportunities
Tending	Empathy & Care
<b>PRUNING</b>	
No Bearing Fruit	Cut Projects of No-Value
Courage to Prune	Resolve Conflict
<b>TRANSPLANTING</b>	
After Care	Continuous Mentorship/Independent Leaders

## PLANTING

Planting a seed is a way to encourage others to think, to foster ambitious ideas and encourage creativity. The alternative to this leadership style is to be the one who always has the best idea. To members, it's equivalent to digging a hole, placing a fully grown onion plant into the garden, and advertising how amazing one is as a gardener.

### Time Commitment

The key to planting is the commitment. The leader and follower must commit to the time investment and the effort to make it work. Because leaders act as organizational agents in directing members' performance, members ascribe many of their leader's actions to the organization as a whole.<sup>1</sup> In turn, subordinates' job satisfaction influences their commitment towards the organization.<sup>2</sup>

A "greedy" institution is defined as groups that "make total claims on their members, seek exclusive and undivided loyalty, and issue omnivorous demands."<sup>3</sup> The military, college athletic teams, and demanding professions are examples of greedy institutions. Understanding of the "greedy" tools that organizations may be used to build and repair members' commitment.<sup>4</sup>

Committed individuals who commonly believe in and accept organizational values are most often willing to remain in the organization and provide considerable effort.<sup>5</sup> It stands to reason that a person whose personal values differ from organizational values or their leaders'

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<sup>1</sup> Renningstad, C. "Us and Them – First Line Management and Change Resistance." *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* Vol 8 No 2 (2018): 6.

<sup>2</sup> Lizote, S. "Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction: A Study with Municipal Civil Servants." (2017): 947.

<sup>3</sup> Cox, A. "Mechanisms of Organizational Commitment: Adding Frames to Greedy Institution Theory." *Eastern Sociological Society* (2016): 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 686.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammet, S and Muzaffer, A. "The Role of Job Involvement as a Mediator in Employees' Moral Values - Organizational Commitment Relationship: Bosnian Case." *European Researcher* Vol 52 No 6 (2013): 1729.

values will be less committed to the organization. When personal values differ from organizational decisions, the moral dissonance brings one to drift from the organization.

Commitment to the CAF can be broken down into three areas: continuance commitment, affective commitment and normative commitment. These areas define whether a member needs or wants to remain committed to the organization. The commitment to the CAF is discretionary and completely voluntary. Leaders are constantly emotionally invested in completing tasks, developing personnel and trade, while feeling a sense of obligation that has been built overtime.<sup>6</sup> When this emotional connection between a member and the organization is severed, the desire to remain committed dissipates; affective commitment is key to retain talent.<sup>7</sup> To gain the loyalty of trained and experienced leaders, the CAF must appeal to affective commitment to ensure that members feel they want to or should remain in the organization.<sup>8</sup>

## **Prepare Soil**

Healthy soil is the basis of healthy plants and a healthy environment. True leaders think about the whole garden and create a positive work environment. When military members perceive that their work environment is negative, or does not fit well with the needs, wants, and desires that they personally would like fulfilled from work, the discrepancies create diverse strains, which are then hypothesized to affect workers' health and wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> As a result, members' efforts become discretionary and the level of commitment to the organization diminishes.

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<sup>6</sup> Meyer, J and Allen, N. "Commitment in the Workplace: Theory Research and Applications." Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications (1997): 11.

<sup>7</sup> Meyer, J and Allen, N. "The Measurement and Antecedents of Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment to the Organization." The British Psychological Society (1990): 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cullen, J.W. "The Perfect Storm: The Canadian Forces' Fight To Retain its People; How can It Win In This Competitive Talent Environment" <https://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/294/286/cullen.pdf> : 33.

<sup>9</sup> Bickford, S. "Stress in the Workplace: A General Overview of the Causes, the Effects, and the Solutions." Canadian Mental Health Association Newfoundland (2005): 8.

A 2006 study determined that the number one thing that the CAF would have to change to convince departing members to remain is altering the working condition.<sup>10</sup> Members are being forced to work faster and harder than they have been before, while the latter refers to the subjective feelings about the risk of performance, success and progression.<sup>11</sup>

## **Spacing**

Plants that have to compete with their neighbours for nutrients and sunlight are not going to be as healthy although that have all that they need. Allowing members to focus on positional responsibilities, providing time to breathe, reframing negative thoughts, visualizing and compartmentalizing tasks and emotional triggers will improve mental health.<sup>12</sup> Members will then be far more effective at work and relaxed at home.

People need space to grow, to try out new things, to develop new skills, to change themselves and the organization. Leaders of the CAF must be proactive in recognizing the individual needs for growth and must create the space and environment necessary so that everyone can blossom. Leaders help people develop their skills and empower people to become change agents and leaders themselves.<sup>13</sup>

## **Recognize Plant Stress**

Sometimes when plants look sick or appear to be under attack by insects, the symptoms are actually a sign that the plant is being stressed by environmental factors. Perennials often die not from old age, but from an infection or some environmental trauma.

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<sup>10</sup> Pickering, D. "The Relationship Between Work-Life Conflict / Work-Life Balance and Operational Effectiveness in the Canadian Forces." Defence R&D Canada (2006)  
<https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a473654.pdf>: 7.

<sup>11</sup> Burchell, B. "The Prevalence and Redistribution of Job Insecurity and Work Intensification." New York, NY: Routledge (2002): 6176.

<sup>12</sup> Gertz, G. "Compartmentalization Can Help Soldiers Avoid PTSD." (2014).  
<https://www.decodedscience.org/compartmentalization-can-help-soldiers-avoid-ptsd/41587>

<sup>13</sup> Yukl, G. "Leadership in Organizations." Pearson Education (2013): 90.

The nature of social change has transformed the military environment. Members also experience the continual emotional stressors from everyday personal concerns including financial worries, family, relationships, health problems, environmental activities, losses, social activities and work. Experiencing stress for a long or short period of time, but constantly, activates a stress response system. The problem is that our bodies have the same reaction to all types of stressors. At work and home, the daily stressors keep this response activated and military members do not have a chance to turn off the system.

The nature of military work, workload, amount of free time, supervisor, meeting deadlines, physical exercise, fellow workers, taking care of paperwork, command relationship, leave, overtasked, understaffed, peer pressure, competitiveness, balancing family, consequences of declining succession plans, postings, operational deployments, isolation, and involvement with armed conflict are stressors inherent in the CAF. Whatever the cause(s) of workplace stress, there is no denying its existence as one of the key problems to modern working life. When one allows this stress to escalate it creates brain fog, blocks clarity, and lets negative thinking get out of control. Consequently, military members become attracted to reducing stress in their life by omitting work stress either through depreciating productivity or choosing alternative career plans outside the military environment.

## **NURTURING**

Culture springs mainly from how leaders behave – what they say and do, and how they say and do it. In gardening, you build a fence, water the seeds, add plant food, and cover the seedling if there is an imminent freeze. Great leaders do the same. Leaders must consider how fast a seed grows, in which soil, how much water or sun does it need, what stimulates or hinders its growth, and how does the growth of neighbouring plants affect each other, and so on. Leaders

defend employees, protect them, and give them a place to do their jobs. Any other arrangement can quickly turn into a dictatorship.

Nurturing comes in the form of monthly meetings, feedback review, providing challenging opportunities and encouraging the mentees to stretch their wings and try other things they would otherwise not attempt to do. Traditionally, the relationship between leader and follower has been hierarchical and linear: the leader issues rules and orders, and followers either obey or find themselves disciplined. A conscious relationship is never hierarchical or linear. An affective organizational relationship should always be circular in nature and not leader versus subordinate, but involves a circular dynamic of leader *with* follower. Many behavioural and commitment issues can be headed off simply by altering the dynamic in this way.<sup>14</sup>

### **Plant Growth and Development**

In the garden, continuous growth and death happen at the same time day by day. Often invisible at first, but it happens. Most of the changes are necessary to keep the plants growing. It needs the different seasons so that the plants can rest, gain new strength, multiply, flourish, and bear fruits at the right time. Sometimes, hurricanes, floods, or extreme heat drastically impact the plants in the garden. Trying to make a plant grow faster by pulling on its stem does not make the plant grow faster. Whenever leadership tries to put pressure on personnel for professional or personal growth, it frequently does the opposite. It often kills their motivation and their health. Leadership can only create a healthy environment to support the individual's growth, but leadership itself cannot force people to grow.

If a leader has a zero-tolerance policy relating to making mistakes, this indirectly sends the message to developing leaders to avoid experiences – a necessary ingredient for leader

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<sup>14</sup> Tsabary, S. "The Conscious Parent." Namaste Publishing. Vancouver Canada (2010): 224.

development. In contrast, a learning organization includes a focus on follower development as leaders provide the psychological safety to feel comfortable in taking risks.<sup>15</sup>

The actions of the CAF must be strengthened by a sense of compassion and responsibility towards personnel wearing the uniform.<sup>16</sup> Leaders must understand how members respond to stress and endure their military terms of service mentally sound. Truly demonstrating compassion towards another is characterized by the absence of an expectation of present or future benefits to be received in return from that individual.

### **Remove Impediments**

Like the master gardener, they are the primary weed control expert charged with encouraging growth. Weeds are always a problem in any kind of garden – except in a weed garden. If a gardener recognizes weeds in an area of the garden, the best recipe is to get it out as fast as possible as weeds always inhibit growth. If there are negative effects in an organization like betrayals, disrespect and unsettled conflicts, leadership must react quickly to address and resolve the issue(s). Be creative – as unbalanced behaviour, especially if the person is arousing their self-control in the attempt to be effective, will result in damage over time. This may be experienced and labeled as burnout or fatigue.<sup>17</sup>

It is suggested that emotional support brings health benefits irrespective of the degree of stress encountered by individuals. This support acts as a recipe or buffer against the negative effects of stress. Leaders can help reduce the perception that a situation is stressful and facilitate

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<sup>15</sup> Reichard, RJ and Beck, J. “Are Your Leaders Ready to Develop? Leadership Excellence Essentials.” Aurora Vol 35 No 1 (2018): 16.

<sup>16</sup> National Defence. “Canada’s Defence Policy. Strong, Secure, Engaged.” (2017): 20.

<sup>17</sup> Boyatzis, R.E., Smith, M.L., and Blaize, N. “Developing Sustainable Leaders Through Coaching and Compassion.” Academy of Management Learning & Education Journals. (2017): 12.

healthy behaviours such as physical exercising. Emotional support increases individual confidence in their ability to deal with the challenges that confront them.<sup>18</sup>

### **Strong Roots**

The most important part of any plant is its root. The gardener cannot yet observe any growth, and does not know whether the plant will bear fruits or not until revealed. Leaders need patience and listening ears to sense the growth of the people before their roots become obvious to all. Leaders allow people the time to grow inside first before they grow in the public. For example, leaders can use patterns of thinking and emotions that are open, positive, and learning orienting, which facilitates new learning; or leaders can engage in maladaptive reflection, such as ruminating over the negative aspects of an otherwise successful experience.<sup>19</sup> Research proposes that leaders can better understand follower commitment by attenuating negative influences.

Love and leadership have similar roots, strong relationships, trust, integrity, charisma, character, taking care of others, but where exactly is the intersection? A study was conducted to tie together the psychology of love and leadership behaviour to potentially change the way we approach the field of leadership, leadership assessment, and leader development.<sup>20</sup> More specifically, it examined love as represented by passion and commitment. These components include character, courage, integrity, selflessness, empathy, collaboration, and reflection – all of which includes an amount of emotional intelligence. If leaders display love, or show empathy and compassion, are they seen differently by those that they lead?

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<sup>18</sup> Poortvliet, P. “Mastery-Approach and Mastery-Avoidance Goals and Their Relation With Exhaustion and Engagement at Work: The Roles of Emotional and Instrumental Support.” *Work and Stress Journal* Vol 29 No 2. (2014): 155.

<sup>19</sup> Hannah, S. “Ready or Not: How Do We Accelerate the Developmental Readiness of Leaders?” John Wiley and Sons, Ltd. (2009): 1183.

<sup>20</sup> Ricciardi, J. “Intersection of Love and Leadership – Is Love Appropriate in the Workplace?” <https://cvdl.ben.edu/blog/intersection-love-leadership/> (2014).

## **Sunlight**

Some plants need more sunlight than others do. Moreover, some plants take more of the sunlight at the expense of other plants remaining in the dark. The gardener ensures plants are placed in the right spot and get the sunlight needed. Leaders provide necessary support and encouragement to maintain enthusiasm and effort in the face of obstacles, difficulties, and fatigue. While leaders must be held accountable for results, as well as actions taken or not taken, no blame can be attached for failure if they act conscientiously and give the mission or task their best effort.<sup>21</sup> Disagreeing with this no blame concept for failure, leaders cannot expect members to implicitly trust and respect the leader, and remain motivated to do more than originally expected. Failure to provide sunlight and enable shadows will obstruct growth and kill the growth momentum.

Growth never happens in all areas at the same time. Every plant has its time; some flourish in spring, others in summer. Not all projects boom at the same time and not all people work at the same pace. Therefore, it is necessary for the leadership to know their people and delegated projects well. Leaders would then not develop unrealistically high (or low) expectations and followers would gain confidence or seek opportunities while maintaining commitment to the organization.

## **Tending**

The gardener tends to the plants regularly. Not tending to every plant every day in the same manner, but tending to the plants based on their individual needs. Tending refers to the

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<sup>21</sup> Canada. Department of National Defence. A-PA-005-000/AP-004, Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations. Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy - Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (2005): 122.

behavioural response of caring for oneself and one's off-spring.<sup>22</sup> People have enough negative markers in their life for what they are doing wrong. Be the person who tells them what they are doing right. A secure psychological state for members enables the sustainability of their energy, focus and talent. Ellen Van Oosten found that emotional acumen, including self-assessment, empathy, emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, teamwork, and optimism predicted engagement and career satisfaction.<sup>23</sup> Following this insight would result in more emotional intelligence being demonstrated within the organization.<sup>24</sup> Emotional intelligence should become a new component of the CAF culture, one in which everyone is socialized in the need for coaching others with compassion and empathy. This aligns with "our actions must be underpinned by a sense of compassion and responsibility towards the women and men who wear the uniform, and their loved ones."<sup>25</sup>

## **PRUNING**

### **No Bearing Fruit**

It takes courage to prune. Pruning is a very difficult leadership task, because it challenges people. It often involves disconnecting members away from their comfort zone. Pruning is important so that the plant will not invest too much of its resources into areas which bear no fruits.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> von Dawans, B. "The Social Dimension of Stress Reactivity: Acute Stress Increases Prosocial Behavior in Humans." *Sage Journals* (2012): 652.

<sup>23</sup> Boyatzis, R.E. "Leadership Intelligence." *Cambridge Handbook of Intelligence*. (2018): 6.

<sup>24</sup> Boyatzis, R. "Developing Sustainable Leaders Through Coaching and Compassion." *Academy of Management Learning and Education* Vol 5 Issue 1 (2006): 19.

<sup>25</sup> National Defence. "Canada's Defence Policy. Strong, Secure, Engaged." (2017): 20.

<sup>26</sup> Grahn, T. "Gardening and Organizational Leadership." *School of Global Leadership and Entrepreneurship*, Regent University (2008): 8.

## **Courage to Prune**

Pruning in an organization involves evaluating ongoing projects and cutting those areas, which will not bear lasting fruits, and focus the available resources on the fruit-bearing branches. Produce no waste. By valuing and making use of all resources that are available, nothing goes to waste. Waste arrives in the form of purposeless activity, bureaucracy, or requirements that persist beyond their usefulness.<sup>27</sup> Often the inexperienced gardener makes the mistake to prune too cautiously, particularly with resolving conflict. In difficult times, sometimes external consultants are invited to do the necessary pruning.

Modifying a leader's implicit mentality before a developmental opportunity can drastically alter motivation to develop. If a leader firmly believes that leadership competencies are 'born' traits, then the leader will avoid any sort of failure that could confirm the lack of those traits and instead seek to show-off those traits they do possess. So, this leader's approach to developmental challenges turns out to not be developmental at all. It avoids looking bad and proving how great one is. However, if a leader holds the belief that leadership skills are malleable, then challenges and even failures are seen as opportunities for learning and growth. Those with a growth mindset will seek out more and more leadership challenges with the motivation to master each one.

## **TRANSPLANTING**

### **After Care**

Careful attention to matching mentors and mentees according to communication styles and responsibilities has an impact on success and satisfaction.<sup>28</sup> Developed leaders have the

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<sup>27</sup> Mannen, D. "Sustainable Organizing: A Multiparadigm Perspective of Organizational Development and Permaculture Gardening." *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* (2012): 361.

<sup>28</sup> Hildreth, D. "Ready, Set, Grow! Preparing and Equipping the Rural School Leader for Success." University of West Alabama. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1194721.pdf> : 44.

ability to improve, by instilling practices that facilitate after-action reviews. While independent, leaders are responsible to share stories about their developmental journeys.<sup>29</sup>

## CONCLUSION

There is widespread agreement that military duties involve a variety of stressors. Daily, inherent military stress has a detrimental effect on mental health. Sources of stress cause members to become disengaged from the objective.<sup>30</sup>

A doctrine can define, an instructor can speak to the class, articles can be read, but without deliberately exploring non-regimental mechanisms to grow military leaders [by inviting behavioural shaping with equal or greater focus placed on the positive], this lack of exploration will give CAF talent more of a reason to look elsewhere for employment.

Being a leader is highly dependent on the ability to nurture. Master gardeners know they do not actually ‘grow’ onions, tomatoes, or beans – they can only foster environments in which the plants do grow. The cultural attitude will remain unchanged unless leaders foster a positive environment and nurture the leaders of tomorrow. It is time to develop the next leader.

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<sup>29</sup> Reichard, RJ and Beck, J. “Are Your Leaders Ready to Develop? Leadership Excellence Essentials.” *Aurora* Vol 35 No 1 (2018): 16.

<sup>30</sup> Sonnetag, S. “Being Engaged at Work and Detached at Home: A week-level study on work engagement, psychological detachment, and affect.” *Work and Stress* Vol 22 (2008): 262.

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