



A photograph of a desk with a water bottle and a nameplate, with an American flag in the background. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from a window with blinds. The water bottle is in the foreground, and the nameplate is to its right. The American flag is visible in the background, partially obscured by the window blinds.

Radical Inclusion: *An Interview With Retired Gen. Martin Dempsey*

■ By Arpi Dilanian and Matthew Howard

Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visits with Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade at the Estonian 1st Brigade Headquarters in Tapa, Estonia, on Sept. 15, 2015. (Photo by D. Myles Cullen)

A 41-year veteran
who served as the
Chairman of the Joint
Chiefs of Staff dis-
cusses his views on
building the Army
team for the future.

When it comes to building teams, few people have more experience than retired Gen. Martin E. Dempsey. Across his 41-year career, which culminated with being the 18th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Dempsey was known as a Soldier's Soldier and was revered by those he led. A graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, he also served as the 37th Chief of Staff of the Army and as commander of both the Training and Doctrine Command and the U.S. Central Command. We sat down with him to discuss his take on building the Army team for the future.

You held many key leadership positions throughout your career. What were some of the lessons you learned about building successful teams?

For leaders at every level, from the lowest tactical level all the way up through the Army's senior leadership, I think the best approach is to first think about how you influence before exerting your authority. To me, the best kind of leadership establishes a sense of belonging, makes clear that everyone's contribution matters, and creates an environment where people get the job done because the leader has been persuasive with them.

The way you create high performing organizations that are cohesive and collaborative is by thinking about leadership as influence rather than authority. As soon as you have to exert authority, your leadership has become directive and the team responds differently.

There are obviously times when you have to exert your authority because there's inadequate time to be influential and persuasive. But in the normal course of events, if you are a leader who believes in getting things done through influence, you'll build the kind of trust that will allow the unit to respond positively when you do have to exert authority.

How would you describe your leadership philosophy?

In the kind of leadership environment we live in, one with ubiquitous information, fragile facts, and intense scrutiny, the way to achieve trust within an organization is by being inclusive. I just coauthored a book, titled *Radical Inclusion*, because I believe this so strongly.

As we transitioned to an all-volunteer force, we made a commitment to ensure it would be reflective of the society it serves. That took us down a path of making sure we had a diverse group of leaders in the formations based on gender, ethnicity, and so forth. I think we really made impressive progress.

But let me make a distinction here. The kind of thing we're talking about is beyond simple diversity. It's not just taking stock of whether you have the proper representation of ethnic groups or genders, but, rather, we should be focusing on how inclusive we are. If you're inclusive, the organization will naturally feel like it is contributing and bringing meaning, not just being dragged around by leadership.

Can you discuss the importance of responsibility as it relates to maximizing team performance and realizing potential?

Responsibility is one of the principles of our profession; leaders accept responsibility for outcomes. This means they don't just simply pass the buck. At every level, leaders need to hold themselves accountable for what they can, and should, accomplish at their particular level, whether it's something as mundane as maintenance rates or something as abstract as building the Iraqi army. When they don't have what they need to do so, they have an obligation to make sure the chain of command is informed.

The military can sometimes be criticized for its "can do" attitude. You've probably never met an officer who would say, "No, I can't do that." But we actually have a responsibility to explain both what we can do and



Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the 18th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, delivers remarks at his retirement and change of responsibility ceremony at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall on Sept. 25, 2015. (Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Dominique A. Pineiro)

what we can't. That responsibility is at every level of the organization.

Of all the jobs I had in my career, the one with the least authority was actually when I was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. All the budgetary authority flows through the service chiefs; all the operational authority flows through the combatant commanders and up through the Secretary of Defense and the President. So the chairman's role in some ways is to balance the supply and demand aspects of the force to meet the demands of the combatant commanders to the greatest extent possible, while making sure the service chiefs have the ability to develop forces ready to carry out the combatant commanders' intent.

But that's where responsibility comes in. It would be irresponsible to allow that relationship to become out of balance. If we constantly consume the force as it becomes ready,

it makes it almost impossible for the service chiefs to organize, train, and equip the force as well as educate it on the responsibilities of the profession, its role in society, and its relationship with the American people. It is the chairman's primary responsibility to keep all of that in balance.

How important is sustainment to our operations, and how did you ensure our logisticians were integrated into the joint and coalition teams?

Absolutely vital. A famous logistician back in the Desert Storm era made the apropos comment that logisticians draw a line in the sand beyond which the operators dare not tread. His point was, generally speaking, logistics will determine the capability, speed, and tempo of operations. While that quote was very famous back in the 1990s, I had a much different view. I felt it was a bit pejo-

rative and negative, suggestive that the logisticians were a limiting factor of what we could do. Throughout my entire career, I instead preferred to look at sustainment and logistics as enabling factors.

To ensure they're integrated into the team, you have to include them at every point in the planning, preparation, and execution of the mission. As a battalion and regimental commander, I never allowed my staff to concoct an operations plan, get my approval on it, and then toss it over the transom to the logisticians and say, "Figure out how you're going to support this." Sustainers had to be on the team from the start so we had diverse thinking about these complex challenges.

I personally think that's even more important today. The problems we face are so much more complex, especially in deployments, both the kind we've already fought and the ones we prepare for but have not had to perform yet, such as establishing a base of operation in Europe. That was one of the things I worried about most as chairman.

We had become exclusively capable at the kind of missions we were running in Iraq and Afghanistan but had let some of our expertise in other areas erode, things like the value and importance of deterrence, the ability to set a theater, and the ability to maneuver over distance with a heavy force and ensure all the enablers could move at the same pace. I think the expertise is starting to be regenerated, but we can never take those things for granted. Those who sustain and those who are storming the hill better be involved in the planning and preparation from the beginning or in execution it'll fail.

Can you discuss the role our military spouses and families play in the success of our total Army?

In 2003, I was commander of the 1st Armored Division and was given responsibility for Baghdad. Our mission statement for Task Force



Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his wife, Deanie Dempsey, lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery on Sept. 25, 2015. (Photo by Spc. Cody W. Torkelson)

Iron was to establish a safe and secure environment in which the duly-appointed government of Iraq could restore basic services and security. We were spread out all over the place with more than 50 combat outposts and forward operating bases, and I had 32,000 Soldiers.

As I told my junior leaders, one of the things we learned very quickly was that contrary to other wars, we really took our families with us when we deployed. They all looked at me like I had lost my mind, but my point was that we now had Soldiers either texting, Skyping or FaceTiming with

their families all the time. It was, “Oh by the way, I have to go now because I’ve got to take a convoy out; I’ll text or come back up on Skype when I get back.” So family members now had a real-time sense of anxiety about the well-being of their Soldiers.

It was interesting back in those

days to try to exert some control over that. Finally, I came to the conclusion—and this gets back to the idea of radical inclusion—that the answer wasn't to try to control it because it became nearly impossible. Even if you thought you could, you couldn't. Instead, we actually tried to empower it and to literally make the family members feel like part of the team by sharing information with them about what we were doing and why. It became a very powerful leadership tool.

Initially, we thought the division was going home by Christmas of 2003. That was extended to April, which brought us to one full year, and then we were extended again to July following the Shiite rise. The way we got through that was making sure Soldiers and their families concurrently understood what was happening and why.

I sent Mark Hertling, a brigadier general at the time, back to Europe, where we were mostly based, to partner with my wife, the U.S. Army Europe commander, and the European installation management director. Together they went from kaserne to kaserne doing hour-and-a-half briefings and taking another hour's worth of questions so families understood why our mission was important. Those families then became part of the solution, not part of the problem.

As a commander at any level, if you think you can just worry about those who wear the uniform, it's a big mistake.

What was the most challenging team-building experience you had?

The most challenging experiences are generally those where units come together on relatively short notice, as we experienced in particular during the first decade of this century with things like the surge in Iraq. Everyone in the Army at the time was trying to figure out how we could more quickly adapt and innovate and how we could become more agile. One of the answers that emerged was modularity.

As we began to go down that path, phrases like “plug and play” came into play. We would take brigade combat teams from various divisions, run them through a mission readiness exercise, and then deploy them. But the cost of this model in terms of team building was pretty high.

Throughout the first 20 or 30 years of my career, I belonged to units that trained together habitually. We were task-organized habitually; we always knew which tank company would go over to the infantry brigade or which infantry battalion would come over to the armor brigade, and we trained that way year-round. We got to know each other; our families got to know each other. When you have that kind of constant interaction, it builds a bond of trust that runs pretty deep.

Modularity, of course, is kind of the antithesis of that. People come and go based on the needs of a particular mission. It's the ultimate exercise in task organization. That's difficult because systems or units only become high-performing when they begin to trust each other, not before. As an Army, I think we have to constantly be conscious of this balance between agility that comes through modularity and the bonding that comes through continuity.

Since retiring from service, has your outlook on leadership evolved?

If anything, my beliefs about leadership based on my experiences coming through the ranks have actually been reinforced, especially this idea of trust being the cornerstone of building teams. In today's environment, political corrosiveness has caused having a pleasant conversation about issues, which was always challenging, to become seemingly impossible. We often talk less about the substantive issues than we do about the narrative that accompanies them. It's a battle of competing narratives more than a battle of merit on a particular issue. In that environment, it makes leading more difficult. Fortunately, however, it doesn't make it impossible.

What makes it possible is a commitment to creating a sense of belonging, to make sure people know their contributions matter, and to develop trust. That was how I tried to lead throughout my career, particularly as a general officer where all of the sudden I had influence on the future of the Army and joint force. I'm sure there were individual actions along the way that I would've liked to have come out differently, but in terms of how I tried to build teams, I don't think I would've done anything differently.

What is the most important thing a young Soldier should know as part of the larger Army team?

The best young leaders, be they enlisted, warrant officers, or commissioned officers, have always had a sense that they were part of something bigger than themselves. I personally believe one of the things that makes the Army special is this ability to recognize the greater good we serve, and that's probably even more true today in the current environment.

It doesn't come to life immediately when a young man or woman raises their hand and takes the oath. But if leaders feel that responsibility to continue to educate the force that this is a team of teams, I think we're going to be okay. We can't forget we are one joint force, and it's the American people who are counting on us. If we stay true to our professional ethos, we will succeed.

Arpi Dilanian is a strategic analyst in the Army G-4's Logistics Initiatives Group. She holds a bachelor's degree from American University and a master's degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Matthew Howard is a strategic analyst in the Army G-4's Logistics Initiatives Group. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Georgetown University.