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Who is Calling You Out?

by Colonel Rob Campbell

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Who is Calling You Out? The Crucial Assistance We Need as Leaders

Colonel Rob Campbell

Self-awareness and introspection are the foundational elements of leadership. If you were to attend Rob Campbell University (fictitious) to earn a degree in Leadership, your first course, fall semester – Leadership 101, would be self-awareness and introspection. Know thyself before leading others. I am not a details person. I can go there when needed but it is not my default. I'm outstanding at developing a vision and a strategy but less effective at execution. The rules don't apply to me. I'm a non-conformist. Last but definitely not least in a long list of Rob Campbell-isms, I'm a very patient man. Too patient perhaps. All of these characteristics inform how I show up each day, how I lead and how I engage with others on my team. They can serve me well but they can also be obstacles to effective leadership. I didn't discover these things only through an online assessment such as Myers-Briggs. Moreover, I don't stop at awareness. I ask of myself (and of others) what it means to my leadership and what I should do with this knowledge. My coach shined a spotlight on my personality, communication style, and characteristics, and helped me see them, understand them, and understand what to do with them. Others close to me called me out and forced me to pick up a mirror.

For every assignment I had in the Army I had a sergeant or non-commissioned officer. Sergeants, the envy of every military across the world, are known for telling it like it is. They kept all of us - officers and enlisted trained and ready for war. They ensured we were marching straight, abiding by the rules and standards of the profession. They would be there, when we least expected it but when we needed them most to catch us when we strayed from our values, Army values, which we were duty-bound to uphold and espouse. They either caught us before we fell or helped us up after we did ensuring we learned the lessons of our failures. Sergeants are, as my former boss liked to say, the lifeblood of the Army. We accomplished nothing, especially leadership without them. With each new posting, I would seek this person out. They would be my right hand, my battle buddy, and I would ask something of them; to call me out. And how they did...

My sergeant and I had to be at our very best. Our people were looking to us for great leadership. We as a team on top of a small or large organization needed to be brutally honest with each other. I'd ask him or her for this in our initial meeting. "I need to be able to tell you that you suck and you need to be able to tell me that I suck," I'd say. It wouldn't necessarily happen organically. We had to switch on our radars. It began with

our own vulnerability, confessing personal weaknesses and challenges to help the other be on watch. Indeed, we had to be professional and, at times, discreet when calling each other out. We would do it completely focused on the betterment of our leadership. Our organization expected it, demanded it, and deserved it. I know it helped both of us lead our people better.

By calling out, I don't mean the act of berating someone in public in front of others. I'm talking about advice, warnings, or reminders - professionally delivered, usually one-on-one where the two of you can 'see' behaviors more clearly and work things out. Here are a few examples. "Rob, remember, you are Mr. Patient and this project and its associated problems will need immediate attention. You'll need to muster up some impatience for this. I'll be there to help." "Rob, you established this rule for all of us to follow with good intentions. I believe you made the right call but you, as a non-conformist, will need to set the example abiding by its every word." I've been the 'call out' person for my coaching clients and I have a coach of my own who challenges me in ways others do not. I cherish this not only as a leader, but as a husband and father. A coach will arm you with some self-awareness to help you navigate your leadership journey but it helps to have someone else close to you on your team who you can entrust with this duty. Present it not as extra work but as a requirement for you and the organization to be at their very best. Offer the same service to them.

There is no perfect person or leader. We all come with our quirks and weaknesses which need to be called out and rounded out by those around us. I can get fixed on an idea and stubborn in my ways. My sergeant would call me out on that and, as I say, save me from myself. It is not a game of, "busted!" It is a duty which I have taken on for others and for which I ask others to take on in my behalf or, moreover, the organization's behalf. I do indeed attempt to surround myself with people who can compensate for my weaknesses and vice versa. For instance, I seek out those with photographic memories who can sniff out the details that I cannot or those who are impatient and driven to, 'get it done now.' This being my method, I need that person who knows me and who is not afraid to confront me when needed. In the Army that was my sergeant. In my encore life, that is my coach or a trusted confidant in my life and or work.

I believe those who lead without someone to call them out are leading less effectively. We do of course have our spouses. Mine is outstanding in this capacity but she is not there when I'm leading and because I'm with her so much, I may not listen to her as I would someone else. This same phenomenon occurs with children. As a parent, children often won't listen to you and take your advice but will from another influential person in their life like a sports coach or teacher. It matters less who and perhaps where this person is. It matters more that you have him or her or several of them to call you out. Start tomorrow. Sit down with 'that' person and share your introspection – your quirks, strengths, weaknesses, and obstacles to be the best leader you can be. Share

with them what you struggle with most as a leader – what you wish you were better at. Refresh the relationship asking for their help. Answer this question for them and ask it of them. “If we were going to work together on something very important, what would you want me to know about you?” Present scenarios where you might need calling out. Tell past stories to illustrate the sharp edges of your leadership which need rounding out. Be vulnerable and ask for their help. Who will call you out today?



Rob Campbell is an Army Colonel turned author, speaker, and executive leadership coach. Rob founded Rob Campbell Leadership in 2017 following a 27-year Army career. A three-time combat veteran and recipient of three Bronze Star Medals, Rob shares his lessons from the battlefield to organizations of all kinds. Rob is a small business owner in Johnson City, Tennessee and a staunch veteran and military spouse advocate. Find him at RobCampbellLeadership.com.

Hear Rob speak at the **2023 AENC Annual Meeting** in Winston-Salem, NC on Tuesday, July 25th.

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