

The Duties of Command

POLICE accountability and leadership are in the news. 'Platypus' is pleased to publish this paper on the subject by Senior Sergeant Peter Wilde who won the Academic Achievement Award and the Public Speaking Award at the Commissioned Officers' Qualifying Course No. 8004 held at the AFP College, Barton, late last year.

Accountability, according to Donald Gilling, is 'the need to answer in another place for actions and decisions'. This is a very general definition but therein lies its suitability for this paper. It does not, you will note, refer specifically to the actions or decisions of a particular person. It is not restrictive in holding a person accountable only for his own activities. The definition permits us to examine the accountability of a person for the actions and decisions of others, namely those over whom one has been given managerial authority.

Discussion

2. No matter what our definition of accountability, our attitude to, or acceptance of, the notion depends largely on our own personal ethics. Ethics has been described as 'that which one ought to do'. Ethics is concerned with the principles, whether they are innate or expressed in some code, which one accepts and espouses to maintain a moral approach to one's life, both public and private. It refers to those standards of conduct which one accepts as necessary, particularly for a person with public responsibility.

Self Esteem

3. A person of substance cannot be motivated in his actions only by counting the outside rewards or sanctions that may flow from them. It is true that our activities may be governed, to a certain extent, by the perception of others. When those we recognise as stake holders, be they the public in general, superiors or Parliament, decide to audit the use or misuse of power given, they have recourse to sanction provisions. In some part a person's actions will be accommodated by his perceptions of those sanctions.

4. But the genuine leader, the one who intends to, and ultimately will, win the hearts and minds of his followers, is the one who acts firstly to please himself. His actions and decisions will stand up to self

scrutiny, so there is little or no requirement for the public forces to be pressuring him into more ethical behaviour. This person regards himself as the most important stake holder in his activities. For him there is no sanction more disturbing than knowing that he has lowered his own standards of behaviour; no reward is more fulfilling than genuine peace of mind.

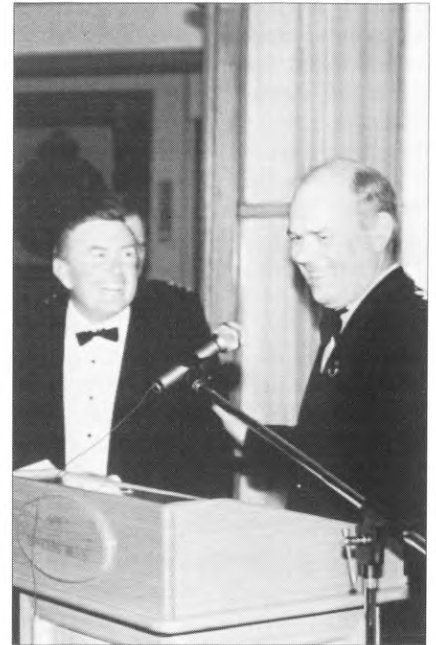
Esteem for Others

5. Associated with esteem for oneself is a genuine concern for the well being of others. This is of particular importance in the person who has been given responsibility for others. It is all too easy for a leader in such a situation to consider the persons for whom he is responsible as mere tools to be used in successfully completing an allocated task. Even the terminology used in modern organisations tends to exaggerate this non-personal approach. 'Human resources' is hardly a description that evokes awareness of an individual person's needs or feelings. And yet these are the things of which a leader should be aware if he is to be truly effective.

6. One of the difficulties in adjusting our activity to cater for the needs of others is that human beings in general, and if we want to be specific, police officers in particular, are not naturally disposed always to do what it would be best that they should do. Even, that is, if they are able to see what that is. People are naturally prone to act on impulse and to be moved by short term rather than long term considerations. We should, as managers and leaders, recognise these limitations in human behaviour. They are not to be pursued as vagaries of conduct worthy of condemnation but as traits of character to be turned and moulded into acceptable activity.

Obligation or Privilege

7. In reality most people have no trouble in coming to terms with the



Sen. Sgt. Peter Wilde (left) being congratulated by Ch. Supt. Peter Dawson (Commander Training Division)

notion of accountability as it applies to their own actions. We are quite prepared, and generally willing, to be called to account for what we ourselves have done or any decisions we have made. The hesitation and doubt arises when we are called upon to answer for the actions and decisions of others. Most people find it difficult to accept responsibility for activities that are, at the time of execution, remote from the possibility of their own intervention. Most find it almost impossible to be held accountable for persons who act outside their specific rules of conduct or behave in a seemingly erratic or unpredictable manner. However, the claim that people act in that way is often the forerunner to someone else trying to avoid accountability.

8. Is it an obligation or a privilege to be held to account for the activities of others? Too many, it would seem, view accountability as an obligation. It is viewed as one of the negatives that accompanies promotions and greater responsibilities within our organisation. The general consensus that seemed to come from syndicate discussions and earlier presentations on this cause was that one could not be expected to be held accountable when others disobeyed your orders, or performed tasks that were completely outside their normal routine or pattern. Similarly some try to distance themselves when those for whom they are supposedly responsible make wrong decisions without reference or without seeking guidance. How quick are some to try to duck for cover? Accepting the blame is not an easy thing.

9. How much easier it would become if only we could see accountability as a privilege. We consider it a privilege when we are given rank and responsibility. Not too many these days view promotion as a right or reward. Most accept it as the conferring of greater responsibility on those who have demonstrated an ability to accept and exercise it in a proper manner. If it is a privilege to be chosen, it should also be a privilege to perform. And although accountability is only one of the pillars on which true leadership rests, it is often one of the most visible in both directions.

Blame and Credit

10. Particularly is this visibility evident in the direction of those for whom we are responsible. If these persons see a leader who is prepared to stand and take the blame when things have gone wrong, then they will later willingly accept criticism for their wrongful actions or decisions. But they will have no loyalty for the man who retreats when things go wrong, who is not only unwilling to accept blame but actively promotes its settlement on others. Such a man is devoid of personal principles and ethics, and has no place in a worthwhile organisation.

11. By the same token, the man who accepts the blame generally has no hesitation in giving credit where it is due. To take all the credit is, of course, as equally



Course Sword of Honour winner Sen. Sgt. Peter Donaldson (centre) with Supt. John Dau (Commander Careers Training Branch) and Mr Dawson.

reprehensible as shirking the blame. The true leader shares in the credit that is bestowed upon his men, without actually being in the limelight. Nothing pleases a man more than to know that his efforts, in whatever field, are appreciated by those for whom they were performed. There is nothing more soul destroying than to be always told when things go wrong and hear nothing when things go right.

CONCLUSION

12. For too long accountability has been regarded as an obligation that

accompanied authority or responsibility. Those with legal minds have imposed upon the relationship that exists between leaders and their followers a notion that accountability can be tested in other forums according to set standards and principles. But accountability is a thing of the heart. The leader who cares for his men is not constrained by rules and regulations. His concern is for individual needs and requirements. His reward is peace of mind and unquestioning devotion from his followers.



Directing staff and members Commissioned Officers' Qualifying Course No. 8004.