



## Development by Grace vs. Zero Defect Mentality

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*This chapter provides a practical application of Grace Leadership in a large organization. With over 3 million employees, the US Department of Defense is one of the largest employers in the world with four main departments and thousands of subordinate commands. Multiple human capital management systems have been implemented throughout this system, with varying levels of success. Through the many leadership changes since World War II, two powerful yet unofficial systems have taken root: a Zero-Defect Mentality (ZDM) spotlighting even the smallest personal failure, and a corresponding unofficial patronage system that applies grace to some leaders at the expense of the rest. ZDM created the need for patronage where senior officers provide absolution and atonement for individual mistakes and transgressions against the organization. Officers without powerful patrons are left to suffer career death or banishment by way of departing military service. These two systems have stifled creativity, stymied innovation, and created a risk-averse officer*

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*corps unwilling to deviate from the status quo. Extending grace in the development of new military leaders foments the trust and goodwill necessary to allow for growth, experimentation, and innovation. Unlike military patronage, Christ's patronage extends grace to all who follow Him.*

Grace is an unearned or undeserved gift given from another (“Grace”, 2020). This gift is given from a person with higher authority and power to a person of lower authority and power through a system of patronage (deSilva, 2000). The greater the power difference, the greater the grace (Bowling, 2011).

The United States (US) military implemented a human capital management system called Total Quality Leadership (TQL) based off Deming’s Total Quality Management (TQM) system (Hourani & Hurtado, 2000). Without customers to please or a bottom line to chase, the military concentrated on alternate performance measures like cost-effectiveness and mission readiness (Kidder & Bobbie, 1996). This alternate focus created a concentration on applying the Zero-Defect (ZD) quality model to human capital management with some significant unintended consequences (Thornton, 2007).

The Department of Defense (DoD) has some incredibly advanced technological systems and benefitted greatly from TQL’s focus on quality improvement (Baum, 2019). Quality centered continuous improvement (CI) initiatives require a matching culture able to apply CI principles to human capital management (Gimenez-Espin et al., 2012). DoD’s adaptation of TQL did not fully implement all the organizational factors necessary for TQL to be a successful method of leading people and managing careers (Hourani & Hurtado, 2000).

No matter how sophisticated the organization’s technologies are, the ultimate high technology system is the people behind the machines (Blanchard & Ruhe, 1992). All CI initiatives work by eliminating deviations, variations, and nonconformities (Gimenez-Espin et al., 2012). While deviation and variations are bad for machines and systems they are elemental and, with human beings, an inescapable aspect of human capital management (Tofte, 2010).

People have an incredible diversity of backgrounds, skills, talents, and knowledge (Tofte, 2010). No two people are the same, so an objective measurement of personal behaviors is impossible to create (Blanchard & Ruhe, 1992). However impossible it may be, organizations never stop trying to define perfection (Tofte, 2010).

## CONTEXTUAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The US military did not intend to develop a perfectionist system of human capital management. Rather, they slowly marched down a road of increasing meticulousness until the tolerance for personality flaws and professional errors eventually reached zero (Blanchard & Ruhe, 1992). As Thornton (2007) stated, they pursued a “laudable but misguided desire to strive for the faultless performance of organizational tasks” (p. 140).

Likewise, the Zero-Defect Mentality (ZDM) did not occur in a vacuum. Humans are predisposed to desire flawlessness and commonly expect it in others more than they expect it in themselves (Curran & Hill, 2019). Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, corporate America was enthralled with perfectionism and continuous improvement efforts (Kujala & Ullrank, 2018).

This inherent perfectionism was coupled with an engrained system of patronage within the US military’s officer corps. Under a patronage system, leaders replicate themselves by choosing a small number of protégés from the next generation’s emerging leaders to groom and guide (Deniaux et al., 2006). Under this system, young officers with patrons receive gracious forgiveness for mistakes, while officers without patrons suffer the consequences of every misstep. In this environment, even benign errors and common mistakes can sidetrack the career of even the most promising young officer (Bunte, 2018).

### *Perfectionism*

Perfectionism is a compulsive pursuit of an unattainable goal (Carducci, 2020). It is an attempt to portray a flawless presentation of the standards and norms common in the broader culture (Curran & Hill, 2019). It results in a need to exemplify the admirable qualities of the broader culture and conceal or camouflage any negative qualities or behaviors (Hewitt & Flett, 2010).

Perfectionism can be socially prescribed, self-oriented, or other-oriented (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Socially prescribed perfectionism is a perception within an individual that others require them to be perfect, specifically a spouse, a boss, or society in general (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Self-oriented perfectionism is an individual’s irrational need to appear perfect themselves or display an unrealistic or punitive self-description (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Other-oriented perfectionism is where someone has an irrational need for those around them to appear perfect, specifically a spouse, children, or subordinates at work (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

No one is capable of perfection but craving the perception of perfection is a common trait among humans (Stoeber et al., 2021). Striving for perfection is reasonable with the understanding that actual perfection is unattainable (Stricker et al., 2019). Perfectionism is the unreasonable expectation that achieving perfection is possible (Stricker et al., 2019).

### *Salvation by Works*

Old Testament Judaism operated on a complex system of laws and a labyrinth of interpretations that became increasingly difficult to follow (Walton, 2019). Maintaining a righteous life under the law was the sole path to salvation; sin was a deviation from this path and sacrifice was the only remedy for atonement and absolution (Walton, 2019). Those able to maintain a path close to righteousness often developed pride and found identity in maintaining the behaviors necessary for salvation by works (Robertson, 1933).

Perfectionism and salvation by works are identical principles of behavioral justification under a system of laws governing individual behavior within a larger group (Hewitt & Flett, 2010). Perfectionism is merely the modern translation of this same premise of purification through effort (Hewitt & Flett, 2010). For instance, working harder than others, working longer hours, and making fewer mistakes justifies and validates one's existence (Walton, 2019). In both of these works-related systems, the individual derives a sense of identity from being closer to perfect than others. However, Scripture indicates that instead of perfectionism and salvation by works, the saved are given grace (Hultgren, 2017).

In the Jewish tradition, purification and redemption were achieved through sacrifice and atonement (Lev. 1:2–4). In the Christian tradition, this purification was achieved *en toto* as Jesus was sacrificed once for all and became the sacrifice in atonement for all of humanity (Rom. 6:10). This created a new type of redemption where one sacrifice absolved past, present, and future sin for all humanity (Ribbens, 2012).

### *An Introduction to Patronage*

Salvation by faith extends God's grace to those who do not deserve it through faith via His patronage. Patronage is the act of coming under the shelter of a respected and powerful benefactor capable of providing favors, assistance, and protection (deSilva, 2018). Patronage connected social

unequals for mutual benefit for the purposes of supporting the beneficiary and simultaneously growing the patron's power (deSilva, 2000). Patron-beneficiary relationships could be sought in terms of familial, friendship, or employment relationships through mutual respect even though the power within the relationship was severely unbalanced (deSilva, 2000).

Patronage typically included a third party acting as a mediator or broker connecting beneficiaries to patrons (deSilva, 2018). These brokers facilitated the formation and maintenance of the patronage relationship and could bridge the social and relational gap between patrons and beneficiaries (deSilva, 2018). Salvation is patronage by accepting God's protection as His child through Jesus as broker (Rom. 5:1).

Organizational patronage is protection via an executive authority or mentor higher placed in the organization (Konstan, 2005). This patron possesses the power and authority to extend grace covering for imperfection and overlooking violations the organization views as sins (deSilva, 2000). However, this version of patronage cannot cover everyone. Patronage is limited to the few individuals to whom grace is given and the rest of the imperfect employees are left to fail (Konstan, 2005).

Others choose between less powerful patrons or are left without patronage (Deniaux et al., 2006). Less powerful patrons have lower structural authority and less administrative power resulting in a reduced authority to waive away transgressions (Deniaux et al., 2006). Others left without patronage have no protection or guidance, leaving the individual open to second-rate or high-risk career opportunities that a patron's guidance would have prevented (Deniaux et al., 2006).

Some military patrons lose their authority or power through retirement, transition, misconduct, or other circumstances. A patron's retirement or other favorable departure might see grace passed down to a favored benefactor within their patronage hierarchy, and the process continues unabated (Deniaux et al., 2006). An unfavorable departure due to misconduct or other fall from grace eliminates the protections granted under patronage and leaves everyone within the hierarchy vulnerable (deSilva, 2000). Without protection they must find another patron willing to offer them the safety and protection of a new sanctification (Deniaux et al., 2006).

Patronage is a longstanding cultural tradition still in practice in many Mediterranean cultures (deSilva, 2000). While it is not an inherently bad system, it creates a structurally flawed system of winners and losers that benefits those with patrons at the expense of those without patrons, or

with patrons of lesser status (Konstan, 2005). The patronage of Jesus is not subject to any of those limiting factors, and gives protection and authority derived from the Living God, the highest authority in the universe.

This chapter examines patronage and salvation through Christ Jesus compared against workplace patronage in the US military officer corps. While both structures have similar patronage systems, military patronage is only available for a select few while the universal patronage God offered through Jesus is available to anyone who believes. Using social-rhetorical analysis, this research shows how patronage is problematic in a secular leadership context, but critical for grace in Christ.

### SOCIAL-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Social and cultural elements within a text give hints at how an author prioritizes topics, relationships, and values according to their social and cultural principles (Robbins, 1996). These priorities are revealed by the topics the author finds important, the order of things included, and by the silence of what is omitted and left unsaid (Robbins, 1996). Any ideology is of little use unless it is shared with others and found to be relevant or useful to a larger group of people to capture and express a view of reality they can understand, believe in, and share (Robbins, 1996). By examining Paul's use of the patronage structure common to the first century, this paper highlights an application of salvation and grace as God's gift through Christ as patron providing the conduit to salvation.

Paul presented his letter to the Romans as a message to believers he had never met with words of personal kindness and encouragement and connection (Hills, 1983). This letter is a clear and systematic explanation of this new faith where all of humanity is sinful, yet still eligible for salvation (Hills, 1983). He provided responses to common theological challenges from both Jewish scholars and Gentile religions and aspired to modify existing Jewish and Roman cultures through a renewal of the mind to create a counterculture through Christianity (Robbins, 1996). Paul used a conversionist ideology to save the world by transforming people through salvation in Christ (Ribbens, 2012). Instead of making Christianity fit into the existing cultures of ancient Israel and Rome, Paul showed how a new culture is revealed through the Gospel for the salvation of all humanity (Stettler, 2015).

The Apostle Paul appealed to the early Jewish traditions of perfection and justification by using similar language from Hebrews 9–10 (Ribbens, 2012). Sin was addressed as the fault of humanity and germane to humanity’s imperfect nature (Stettler, 2015). This sinful nature requires atonement through sacrifice to reconcile the unrighteousness of humanity to a righteous God (Ribbens, 2012).

The Old Testament covenant required adherence to a rigid law with unending interpretations as additional opportunities for failure (Glodo, 2018). Christianity’s new covenant provided the same absolution to any believer, in any nation, of any culture, through a justification by faith and a commitment to cease their previous sinful behaviors (Stettler, 2015). This new covenant grace forgives sins past, present, and future where the old covenant required a separate atonement for each sin as they occurred (Ribbens, 2012).

### *The Law*

According to Jewish tradition, Moses received the Law atop Mount Sinai as a covenant between God and His chosen people (Ex. 31:17–18). The Mosaic Law was unique amongst Ancient Near East (ANE) cultures because violations of the law were violations against God (sins) rather than fellow members of the community (Walton, 2019). The penalty for sin was separation from God in the present, eternal banishment in the afterlife, and loss of one’s soul (Ex. 34:4–7). In other cultures, violations against the rest of society were crimes for which there were prescribed punishments but did not include any concept of eternal repercussions (Walton, 2019).

The Law was truth, promise, and justice revealed directly from God, defining the irrevocable gift and promise to care for His creation as long as humans complied (Haddix, 2004). God served as giver of laws, punisher of sinners, and also dispenser of blessings (Dt. 28:1–3). His wrathful judgment was a mixed message of simultaneous grace and punishment depending on one’s ability to adhere to the tenants of the Law (Robertson, 1933).

Keeping the Law meant blessings, rewards, and eternal life; violating the Law meant curses, punishment, and death (Lev. 26:1–46). This amplified the need for atonement, forgiveness, and approval from the living God (Humphrey, 2018). Reconciling the inequality between life and

death, blessings and curses, rewards and suffering was possible through choices in life and making atonement for sin (Humphrey, 2018).

Sin separated humanity from God because He could not be in the presence of sin (Eph. 2:11–13). Atonement was required before God could return (Hultgren, 2017). The presence of sin meant the absence of God, and if God was not present neither would His blessings (Campbell, 1981). The only way to obtain atonement was to appeal to God through sacrifice that came at a cost in one way or another to the penitent (Walton, 2019). Sacrifice was meant to cleanse the person so God could return and ransom their soul from death (Hultgren, 2017).

The prescription for sin was costly, time consuming, and difficult but prevented separation from God and His blessings (Ps. 49:7–15). Living within the Law was methodical and difficult but still easier, cheaper, and carried less risk than the alternative (Campbell, 1981). Living within the law could create a pride in accomplishment, as all challenging accomplishments do (Walton, 2019).

While this was neither the objective nor the intention of the Law, outward manifestations of piety and visible adherence to the Law became a cultural status symbol (Walton, 2019). This cultural phenomenon became a shared cultural identity within the Jewish people (Ribbens, 2012). Piousness, devoutness, and adherence to the Law were critical cultural norms and ascribed considerable social power and status (deSilva, 2018).

This legalistic application of the ever-increasing rules and regulations multiplied the opportunities for transgression, and all violations of the Law were considered sin (Haddix, 2004). Sin can only exist against the structure of the Law, for without a Law to break there could be no sin (deSilva, 2018). Time only created more Law, for each case brought to a judge resulted in legal decisions creating additional rules and regulations (deSilva, 2018).

As the volume of Law increased opportunities for sin increased accordingly. The Jewish people faced an impossible challenge to live perfect and righteous lives and remained in bondage to judgment as a result (Rom. 7:7–25). Sin required satisfaction, wrath required retribution, and atonement came at an increasingly challenging cost (Stenschke, 2017). The Law was not structured to allow for justification regardless of one's level of piety (Stenschke, 2017). Atonement and redemption were possible, but no one could be truly justified through the Law as justification was never the Law's purpose (Stenschke, 2017).



### *Salvation Through God's Patronage*

The Apostle Paul knew first-hand the problems with perfection-based systems and atonement under complicated systems of laws (Gal. 6:12–13). Prior to his roadside conversion, Paul was a Pharisee enforcing adherence to the Law on those living less pious lives and persecuting a long line of false Messiahs and even Christians (Acts 1:1–3; 9:1–2). Paul confirmed the value of piety and sanctification under the Law but argued that justification and atonement were fulfilled through Christ's crucifixion (Acts 1:16–17).

This forms the basis for salvation by faith and grace for all (Heb. 7:26–28). Paul's challenge was proving the entire process of receiving, interpreting, and following Jewish Law was preparing humanity to receive Christ's sacrifice (Jipp, 2010). Christ's death on the cross was in fulfillment of the promise to complete salvation's arc from death and atonement to grace and salvation (Hultgren, 2017; Jipp, 2010).

Christ acts as broker to bridge the impossible gap between humanity on Earth and God in Heaven (deSilva, 2018). In all patronage systems, a broker serves to connect patrons and beneficiaries by leveling the power distance between social unequals (deSilva, 2000). Brokers intercede on behalf of those seeking patrons and relay requests for favors, connections, and other vertical ties within the patronage system (Constantinidou, 2010).

No longer was the path to salvation reserved for people maintaining the required legalistic piety, it was freely available to Jew and Gentile alike in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Howard, 1970). God's covenant served a solid foundation for salvation by grace extending to all nations in fulfillment of the Law (Campbell, 1981). This covenant stated He would bless all nations through Abraham's descendants who would be as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:5–6).

### *Perfection is Impossible*

God's divine justice is passed on to all humanity and no one meets the impossible standard of perfection; all are found guilty of sin, and all have earned His wrath (Ribbens, 2012). "For all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God." (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Rom. 3:23).

Through Christ's sacrifice, humanity receives righteousness and atonement in a judicial process where His death serves to ransom sinners paying atonement and earning humanity the divine liberation God offers (Robertson, 1933).

This undeserved justice covers all sins regardless of person, location, or time, and is completely undeserved by the recipient (Heb. 10:29–30). Christ is substituted in humanity's place and satisfies the debt under the Law (Humphrey, 2018). Christ's sacrifice does not merely pardon sins (guilt remains but punishment is waived), grant clemency (guilt remains with a lesser punishment), nor does it offer mercy (guilt without blame and punishment withheld) but complete absolution (Humphrey, 2018). Christ's sacrifice offers grace by bearing the full punishment, pain, and penalty for humanity's transgressions by standing in as a substitute (Humphrey, 2018).

The Greek word for the debt of sin is the same word as ransom (Ribbens, 2012). It is the same Greek term used for releasing criminals, slaves, and prisoners of war (Ribbens, 2012). It was also the word used in the Bible's Greek text for the release of the Jewish people from Egypt during the Exodus (Ribbens, 2012).

This liberation by ransom payment is the definition of redemption, and therefore is the crux of the Gospel and the center point of all scripture (Hultgren, 2017). The gift is the giver, and God is extending His righteousness in Christ (Humphrey, 2018). This demonstrated His supreme and divine righteousness by fulfilling His law and simultaneously exempting His creation from the consequences of sin and transgression (Humphrey, 2018).

### *God as Benefactor with Jesus as Patron*

Patronage was common in both Roman society and many ANE cultures and is still practiced in Mediterranean societies today (deSilva, 2018). Many forms of patronage existed in Western cultures as well (Konstan, 2005). It was the dominant social structure of early societies and was the principal method of economic and political interaction across all hierarchies (Constantinidou, 2010).

Patronage was a social structure between social unequals where favors, honors, and friendship were exchanged and transacted between members in a long-term alliance (deSilva, 2018). In making payment for sin, God

acts as benefactor through Jesus as broker making the necessary connection and relationship between sinner and God (Monkemeir, 2018). As a celestial benefactor, God accepts faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross in exchange for salvation, a permanent and indelible gift only He can give (deSilva, 2018).

This salvation through grace is a benefit all humanity is eligible to receive in common and equal shares (Monkemeir, 2018). It is not a gift reserved for some groups and denied to others, nor is it issued in unequal portions, more to one individual and less to another (Monkemeir, 2018). The price for this gift has already been paid, once for all, and its value is retroactive to those sins committed both before and after the price was paid (Heb. 10:10).

In the New Testament, Paul and other authors described the church as *in Christ* using the language of patronage to describe the church as under Christ's protection (Rom. 6:11). Christ serves as a broker, mediator, or interceder between humanity and the Living God (Walton, 2019). Jews and Gentiles alike receive salvation through Christ and become part of God's family through His kinship (deSilva, 2018).

God did not offer sinners freedom from the imprisonment of sins only to abandon them. Rather, through patronage God makes sinners part of His family and members of His household (Humphrey, 2018). This patronage carries the right and responsibility to speak in the benefactor's stead and act on His behalf (deSilva, 2018). The patronage system gives them the authority to speak for the owner of the house and to enjoy the benefactor's wealth (deSilva, 2018).

The cross extended the Father's love for the Son onto each and every sinner, giving them purity, place, and a patronage within His house through their faith in Jesus (Robertson, 1933). Once a sinner joins God's patronage through salvation in Christ, they have the power, blessing, and authority to speak on God's behalf and enjoy God's blessings and abundance (Ribbens, 2012). As God gave grace freely and unselfishly so must the sinners He redeemed share grace with others (Ribbens, 2012).

By sharing the grace that is given, followers of Christ extend the blessings of God the benefactor and share patronage through Christ (Robertson, 1933). God's universal patronage is available to all since all have sinned and fallen short of perfection (Rom. 3:23). God's grace and patronage are impartial to Jews and Gentiles alike and grants both groups salvation and protection through Christ's payment of the debt that comes from sin (Ribbens, 2012).

Like all imperfect humans, the Jewish people deviated from God's leading from time to time (Hos. 7:13). However, each of these departures made Israel increasingly exemplary candidates for salvation through God's grace. Those wanderings were eventually the keys to receiving grace through the fulfillment of the law, and patronage through Christ (1 Pt. 2:24–25).

## ZERO-DEFECT MENTALITY

A perfectionist model of human capital management began creeping into the US Military between World War II (WWII) and end of the cold war in 1991 (Thornton, 2007). This perfectionist model borrowed the name Zero-Defect Mentality from the manufacturing quality control effort (Thornton, 2007). This model is effective in improving the quality of manufactured goods, but it is an ineffective way to improve human performance (Baum, 2019). Like salvation by works, it is a flawed system requiring constant effort and attention to keep up with a continually growing list of potential risks and errors.

### *Origin of Zero-Defect Mentality*

Militaries are organized and designed to fight wars and military leaders are promoted for leading successful military operations during wartime (Bailey, 2009). Between major wars and military conflicts, the military is focused on military operations other than war, which require an entirely different method and style of leadership (Thornton, 2007). As the US military shifted from the operational mindset of WWII to the post-war administrative focus, the definition of success changed for an entire generation of military leaders (Thornton, 2007).

During combat operations, the military is focused on effectiveness (Bailey, 2009). High-performing leaders are identified by their operational successes and battlefield leadership focused on achieving objectives, quick decision making, and balancing of risk versus mission accomplishment (Thornton, 2007). After the conclusion of major conflicts, the military shifts into a garrison structure focused on efficiency (Bailey, 2009). The new measures for leadership are organizational skills, administrative prowess, and cost reduction (Thornton, 2007).

### *Patronage in the US Military*

Patronage plays a part in the US military's application of the ZDM. Military leaders seek a patronage from senior officers as a mentor or advisor, called a sponsor (Miller, 2014). This patron sponsor may be a senior leader within their assigned unit or one from the broader pool of other leaders within their career specialty but assigned to a different unit (Miller, 2014). The junior officer supports the sponsor to receive favorable assignments and performance reports, and the senior officers engage in empire building, constructing a network of up-and-coming leaders to groom and protect (Miller, 2014).

Patrons select beneficiaries carefully and premium patrons are extremely selective, choosing few and eschewing many (Deniaux et al., 2006). The remaining officers must find a lesser patron and possibly not receive patronage at all (Deniaux et al., 2006). Given large number of benefactors, a small number of patrons, and a finite reward system patronage is inherently limited. Not everyone can receive equal benefit (deSilva, 2000). Unlike salvation by grace through God's unlimited patronage, the limited patronage in the US Military exacerbates problems and multiplies the negative effects. The cumulative effect of this system created numerous unintended cultural consequences (Pratt, 2004).

## ZERO-DEFECT MENTALITY IN PRACTICE

Almost every year since its inception, Harvard's National Leadership Index ranks the US military as the most trusted leaders in any industry, institution, or company (Rosenthal, 2012). Military leaders are known for strong positional structure, rigid hierarchy, transactional leadership, top-down decision making, and allowing very little bottom-up feedback (Rosenthal, 2012). While this description does not fit every military unit or leader, it is generally true of the overall structure and communication system (Saunders, 2018).

The US Military is not immune to management fads and has applied many new systems and styles throughout the decades (Kidder & Bobbie, 1996). Management By Objectives was an attempt to get better unit performance by distributing clear objectives throughout the organization so each individual had the knowledge, power, and authority to work independently toward common goals (Kidder & Bobbie, 1996). Total Quality Leadership was a military adaptation of Total Quality Management that

pushed decisions down to the lowest possible level in an attempt to minimize decision delays and expedite action (Doherty & Howard, 1994). The US Military Academy at West Point even developed a military specific system called Philosophy of Mind that focused on learning followership before leadership (Pratt, 2004).

These modern business management practices were applicable to some part of the military structure and systems, but nothing applied universally to the entire organization (Bailey, 2009). Each style saw some success, but none had wide acceptance or any appreciable longevity (O'Connell, 2010). The one management style that stayed the course was the least intentional, the most pervasive, and arguably the most organizationally toxic (Pratt, 2004).

### *Phil Crosby and the Zero-Defect Model of Quality Control*

Phil Crosby came from a family of doctors who ingrained in young Crosby the importance of eliminating mistakes (Johnson, 2001). Crosby dropped out of medical school to enlist as a US Navy (USN) hospital corpsman (medic) during WWII (Johnson, 2001). He completed medical school after the war and continued his service as a military doctor during the Korean War (Johnson, 2001).

With many years of military experience, Crosby chose to forego a medical career and continued working in the defense industry (Johnson, 2001). He became a quality control engineer with Martin Marietta aircraft company working on military aircraft projects (Crosby, 2006). He brought a doctor's attention to detail to the production line and formulated the Zero-Defect Model (Johnson, 2001). This concept became his life's work and a system implemented by many major manufacturing companies and all five branches of the US Military (Crosby, 1997).

The Zero-Defect Model included 4 absolutes of quality management that explain how to build an organization focused on making quality products: (1) quality is conformance to requirements; (2) quality is prevention of defects, not appraisal of products; (3) the standard must be ZD, not close to zero; and, (4) quality is measured by nonconformance (Johnson, 2001, p. 26). His model says that every action or transaction is an opportunity to conform to requirements and each of these transactions must be done correctly the first time, every time (Crosby, 1997). These expectations are a possible outcome for sophisticated factories with

complex machinery but an unlikely outcome for fallible human beings with finite energies and attention spans (Love et al., 1995).

Crosby realized that perfection was impossible for individual humans (Crosby, 1979). However, he believed companies and industries could grow into ZD over time through continuous improvement if quality control was viewed as a long-term proposition (Love et al., 1995). He developed a Maturity Grid to show the five stages of quality a company will go through: Uncertainty, Awakening, Enlightenment, Wisdom, and Certainty (Crosby, 1979, p. 48).

Crosby (1979) believed these stages were equally applicable to personal life and leadership development, albeit with different metrics. This equivalence between industrial quality control and leadership development created the human capital strategy ZDM (Thornton, 2007). These laws of defect prevention made their way into military management policy and resulted in an intentional cultural change with positive intentions but toxic results (Sharkey, 2011).

A fan of lists, laws, and principles, Crosby (1979) also listed the 7 Laws of Defect Prevention, with laws 6 and 7 laying all responsibility for performance and maintaining ZD on the organization's leader. These two final laws clearly emphasize the importance of setting and maintaining standards in order to create a ZD system. However, it also defines a climate where leaders bear ultimate responsibility for organizational perfection (Tofte, 2010). Each of these 7 laws drive organizational culture and climate and hinge on management adopting and enforcing the ZD Model in every interaction within the company (Kujala & Ullrank, 2018).

If any employee, manager, or executive cannot accept the standard of ZD they must be purged from the organization (Crosby, 2006). Like the sinner under Old Testament Law, where the sin required sacrifice, the price for transgression against ZD is the sacrificing of one's career (Brown, 2012; Walton, 2019).

Crosby was very clear his pursuit was ZD, not perfection (Crosby, 2006). In his interpretation, a defect was defined as a characteristic that does not conform to the standard (Crosby, 1979). The standard was not a flawless product unless the quality standard is required to be perfection, as it is with surgery or other life-threatening processes (Crosby, 1997). Much like the impossible standards of the Old Testament Law, nonconformance was a defect requiring the offender be judged and rejected regardless of how close to the standard they came (Sharkey, 2011). A miss is a miss.

Most leaders in organizations do not fail for one isolated event, but a series of poor decisions over time that degraded performance and caused decreasing results (Miller, 2014). Like sinners under the old Law, ZDM created inherent conflict causing individuals to inevitably fail as myriad small failures added up to an assessment of poor performance (Baum, 2019).

## ZERO-DEFECTS AND TOXIC LEADERSHIP

The military standard for leadership success is organizational results, and in no service is this more apparent as the USN (Bass & Yammarino, 1991). Performance ratings are overwhelmingly dependent on job performance, technical and tactical proficiency, and success at sea (Nieboer, 2017). Where other services focus on a balance of career achievements, higher education, and positional prestige, the USN considers only one thing: sustained superior performance at sea (Nieboer, 2017). ‘At sea’ is a catch-all phrase for work in a deployable unit, whether it is a ground-based unit, aircraft squadron, submarine, or an actual ship that goes to sea (Bass & Yammarino, 1991).

Over 200 years ago, the first Secretary of the Navy created the first military leadership training system to eliminate mediocre officers and create a professional corps of career sailors (Cutler, 2009). This heritage has developed a system where all USN personnel start as followers but are quickly thrust into leadership roles (Miller, 2014). In these new roles emerging leaders are tasked with supervising peers, more experienced enlisted sailors, and senior technicians with significantly more tactical knowledge than the new leader (Miller, 2014).

### *Sustained Superior Performance...Or Else*

This trial-by-fire leadership development style and performance-heavy rating system are inherently at odds with personal development (Brown, 2012). New officers inevitably stumble and fail on their road to developing as leaders as they gain experience through failure (Brown, 2012). Senior leaders conducting performance rating for emerging leaders must choose between developing the individual and maintaining organizational output (Landis et al., 2014).



Implementing ZDM punishes new officers for this necessary trial-and-error phase and potentially damages careers before they get started (Vego, 2018). Without any system of grace for new officers, early errors are made permanent and the guilty are ushered to the exits (Vego, 2018). This has a chilling effect on creativity, stifles innovation, and stymies initiative by punishing those that possess the moral courage required to take risks (Thornton, 2007). The cumulative effect of several decades of ZDM has created a risk averse officer corps afraid of taking any chances, trying any new ideas, and risking the rewards of innovation (Nieboer, 2017).

The idol of perfectionism is held higher than the value of honesty, so, discussing mistakes with peers or bringing them to the attention of a supervisor is discouraged (Bunte, 2018). This system is contrary to effective leadership that evaluates, processes, and accounts for risks in decision making, instead, creating an aversion to risk that ultimately leads to risk avoidance (Vego, 2018). Naval officers have a pervasive perception that mistakes and failings follow them throughout a career, so they adopt conservative strategies that avoid risk entirely (Miller, 2014).

### *Zero-Defects Creates Zero Innovation*

In the 1980's, the US Army was somewhat purposeless without a major war to fight and turned to modern business practices to rejuvenate their mission, organizational structure, and marketing (recruiting) plan (Bailey, 2009). ZDM was trending and took root immediately within the bureaucratic and detail-oriented life of an Army in garrison (O'Connell, 2010). The Crosby-inspired quality focus showed tremendous success and led to improvements in workplace conditions, standards of performance, and overall conduct (O'Connell, 2010).

However, once ZDM crept into human capital management, it created the same dangerous cultural environment (Bailey, 2009). A risk averse officer corps was forming where the risks of being wrong outweighed any benefit of possibly being right (Bell, 1999). This eroded confidence and trust between superiors and subordinates, reduced motivation and morale, and productivity was dwindling (Bell, 1999).

As human institutions, Army units tend to assimilate the characteristics and personalities of their leaders, even if that leader is ineffective or toxic (Robinson, 2014). While ineffective and toxic leaders produce similar disappointing results, toxic leadership has the appearance of being

effective and tends to enhance a leader's power and longevity in the organization (Aubrey, 2013). In many large organizations, there is an optimal level of midrange toxicity that makes emerging leaders stand out amongst their peers (Grijalva et al., 2013).

An internal Army study found that one in five Army leaders were toxic, where toxic leader was defined as self-promoting, self-centered, and either mistreated or abused their soldiers (Bossard, 2017). Even more surprising, half of the soldiers in the study expected that toxic leader to be promoted, and 18% of them planned on emulating the behaviors of a toxic leader because they saw those traits as synonymous with success (Bossard, 2017). With toxic traits viewed as imperfect but successful, toxicity becomes self-replicating and nearly impossible to eliminate (Leroy et al., 2011).

### *Patronage and Careerism: Looking up or Looking Down?*

Patronage is alive and well in the US military. ZDM has created a system where senior officers identify young leaders and groom them for continued performance (Bell, 1999), much like the patronage system in ancient Israel and Rome (Bardill, 2012). These senior leaders identify hardworking, adaptable employees that are dedicated to the organization and set their protégé's career on a trajectory for continued success at minimal risk (Leroy et al., 2011). Innovation carries risk of failure, so innovation is not encouraged or rewarded, and may even be punished if it challenges a policy created or held by a powerful patron (Brown, 2012).

This careerism makes officers seek high level staff jobs working with more upper echelon leaders instead of operational billets leading troops or organizations, because these roles minimize risk and allow for more exposure to better patrons (Bell, 1999). An officer has the choice of looking down to focus on leading their people and improving their unit or looking up to concentrate on pleasing supervisors and improving their own career (Blanchard & Ruhe, 1992). Looking up maintains the patronage relationship and results in promotions; looking down leads to dead end billets and short careers (Bell, 1999).

These patrons not only guide the careers of their protégés, but also sit on the promotion and selection boards judging the efforts of other seemingly perfect records that have all been inflated to appear flawless (Nieboer, 2017). Promotion is a challenge of beating the quantitative

metrics and showing documentation of the solid link between benefactor, patron, (Bass & Yammarino, 1991). This creates a stranglehold on the promotion process that compares the strength of the patron rather than the quality of the protégé and reinforces the importance of micromanagement in the ZD environment (Nieboer, 2017).

The military calls this the Bathsheba Syndrome, described as successful leaders succumbing to the trappings of success and experiencing ethical failures much later in their career than should be expected (Ludwig & Longnecker, 1993). These ethical problems did not develop suddenly and out of the blue; rather the officer has finally outgrown their patron's ability to protect them (Ludwig & Longnecker, 1993). More likely, as beneficiaries age, their patron inevitably reaches the end of their career and is no longer able to cover personal problems that have been present from the start (Ludwig & Longnecker, 1993).

As complex and entrenched as the patronage program is, it is systematically unfair and flawed because it creates a system that chooses winners and losers (Robinson, 2014). Senior officers are forced to limit patronage or dilute its powerful effect (Craft, 1998). The true value of an officer's promotional potential remains the positional power of one's patron (Craft, 1998).

## DEVELOPING LEADERS THROUGH GRACE

Conversely, patronage through Christ's redemption is universal and applies to all, Jew and Gentile alike (1 Cor. 1:22–24). Any individual who seeks salvation through Christ will receive God as a benefactor (McEvoy, 2010). There is no limit to the number and variety of openings available; it is free to all who call upon the name of Jesus Christ (Howard, 1970).

Grace is defined as a favor, kindness, friendship, or gift bestowed by another ("Grace", 2020). It is also defined as God's forgiving mercy, or gifts bestowed by God including miracles and prophecies ("Grace", 2020). The common thread in both definitions of grace is receiving something unearned from another entity in a position to grant it. It is clemency for a mistake or error, mercy or pardon for a transgression, or sanctification or approval from a higher authority.

Grace in leadership is the role of compassion and kindness for new and emerging leaders in lieu of perfectionism and punishment for their inevitable failures. Grace is especially important in an environment requiring judgment in decision making (Thomas & Rowland, 2014).

Extending grace to followers gives the same goodwill and forgiveness in professional life as in spiritual life, since followers and future leaders inevitably make mistakes, errors, and other flaws common to growth, innovation, and experimentation (McEvoy, 2010).

These moments of grace turn a mistake into a learning opportunity (McEvoy, 2010). Without learning opportunities, there is no learning, and without learning, growth is impossible (Maxwell, 2007). Failure is critical to growth, especially for leaders (Maxwell, 2007). Showing grace requires leaders to show kindness, compassion, benevolence, goodwill, and generosity toward internal and external stakeholders especially when mistakes are made (Thomas & Rowland, 2014).

Demonstrating compassion shifts a leader's focus away from the mechanics of the organization and toward the people within the organization (Davis & Pett, 2002). It moves the organization's culture away from judgment and criticism and toward emotional consistency (Davis & Pett, 2002). This develops the trust and confidence necessary to allow for commitment and innovation (Davis & Pett, 2002).

Leading with grace is understanding leadership is stewardship instead of an ownership (Bowling, 2011). Military leaders rotate in and out of units every 2–3 years and no billet or position is ever intended to be anything other than temporary (Bunte, 2018). Looking down and focusing on the organization focuses on continuing the institution and growing operations (Blanchard & Ruhe, 1992). Grace creates leaders who see people as the purpose of the organization instead of the components of the organizational chart (Bowling, 2011).

New military leaders—as should all leaders—deserve grace in their careers to allow for the learning process to occur and occasionally throughout a career when calculated risks must be made (Halloran, 1988). Recklessness and wild gambles can have expensive or deadly consequences and should end an officer's career (Nieboer, 2017). However, calculated risks with solid understanding of the potential loss and projected reward is the only path to innovation and discovery, and those traits should be rewarded (Thornton, 2007).

## CONCLUSION

ZDM has developed as a human capital management strategy over several decades and created a risk averse officer corps in every branch of the US military (Bell, 1999). This risk-averse system focuses on an appearance of

perfection instead of developing an atmosphere of innovation and experimentation (Thornton, 2007). ZDM created the need for patronage where a senior officer can provide absolution and atonement for mistakes and transgressions against the organization (Miller, 2014).

The US military has unintentionally developed a patronage system that benefits some leaders at the expense of the rest (Miller, 2014). Patrons select up-and-coming leaders to groom, and provide them grace for mistakes (Halloran, 1988). All others not selected for patronage are given no grace (Halloran, 1988). Without powerful patrons, some will be left to suffer career death or banishment by way of departing military service (Bass & Yammarino, 1991).

Conversely, grace through Christ is given to all who believe (Rom. 4:16). He paid the price for transgressions once, for all (Rom. 6:10). No one is refused patronage, or unworthy of being selected to be under Christ's protection (Rom. 3:22).

Through his death and resurrection Jesus became the patron of all who put their faith in Him. They become Christians and come into the house of God through Christ as the broker and interceder (Heb. 8:8–12). His patronage is free and universal, available to all who believe, and extends grace to atone for any and all transgressions (Rom. 6:10).

These two systems are vastly different, since one system withholds grace on an arbitrary measure and the other provides it fully to all who ask. Through grace, God blessed all of humanity with the salvation available through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (Acts 4:12). This sanctification fulfilled the original covenant of Abraham and brought God's justification to every nation, and not just to a chosen few (Rom. 11:26–27).

Both systems offer absolution for transgressions and protection against (career) death and banishment, but only one system is universal and free. God gives grace so that one's talents can be shared with others; it is intended to be shared with others and not hidden under a basket (Mt. 5:14–16). Extending grace in the development of new military leaders foments trust and allows for growth, experimentation, and innovation (Thornton, 2007).

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