

# Book Review



## **Practicing Excellence: Restoring Civility, Faith & Trusted Leadership in the Public Square** *by Anthony Randall*

E.P. House, Las Vegas, NV, 2024, 182 pp.

***Reviewed by Colonel Andrew Morgado***

*Director, Army University Press, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas*

### **Fighting the Bathsheba Syndrome**

***"A few honest men are better than numbers. If you choose godly,  
honest men to be captains of horse, honest men will follow."***

***Oliver Cromwell, September 1643<sup>1</sup>***

All people want to be led well. There is an equal expectation that leaders, particularly in organizations that share in the common trust, exercise their role with virtue and ethical propriety. Too often however, leaders fall short of expectations and the cause of this downfall is usually traced back to the corrupting influence of exercising power at the apex of an organization. This is commonly known as the Bathsheba Syndrome, a reference to the biblical story centered on the ethical failures of King David, where people succumb to the influence of power due to access, an inflated perception of ability, and the loss of strategic focus.<sup>2</sup> Anthony Randall offers an antidote to this malady of leadership and a guide to more positive leadership in his book, *Practicing Excellence*.

Randall's prescription focuses on individual reflection and practice as the key elements of character development. The path to ethical leadership starts within the individual and can only become a true component of one's existence through active and repeated application. Randall, a retired Army officer and chaplain, ties this development of character and leadership as complementing activities. Specifically, he studies how "a morally autonomous agent within a greater heteronomous ethos" can remain true to their moral center and positively influence the larger organization to function ethically and for the common good.<sup>3</sup> More simply, how can a person and leader remain true to themselves working in an organization whose ethos may differ.

Aristotle's "Golden Mean" and focused self-reflection provide the basis of this approach. Aristotle observed that "every virtue consists of two vices, one of deficiency and one of excess."<sup>4</sup> The vice related to wisdom is not folly, but rather both arrogance and foolishness. Avoiding the extremes involves self-reflection and habitual practice. Randall provides a series of six questions an

individual employs to help this introspection to establish their identity, role, and ultimate function as part of a larger organization. The constant interplay of acting, reflecting on that action, and applying positive changes creates a cycle of virtue.

Randall's book is practical and accessible. A certified coach with decades of leadership experience, the author provides examples from his diverse career paths to illuminate both his successes and failures. These examples provide texture to a well-developed philosophical foundation. The combination of theory and application creates a well-marked path for any aspiring or current leader to follow.

A more avid student of leadership and the military professional may find some scholarly gaps and lapses in domain knowledge. Light on footnotes, the reader must make some associations from the bibliography to substantiate some of the foundational theory and trace the logic of the reflective approach. The military practitioner may also be dismayed by some of the inaccuracies found within the doctrinal references and acronyms, but perhaps a former chaplain can be cut some slack on doctrinal accuracy. Neither flaw detracts from the book's principal message.

Leaders seem to be in great supply, but the application of true, trust-based leadership within the current environment is often notable by its absence. "Knowing" ethics and leadership is not the same as "doing." This "know-do" gulf only deepens as trust erodes between the leader and the led when the basic deliverables expected of leaders do not materialize. Anthony Randall's book is a practical guide and useful tool for those who aspire to lead in a complex, contentious, and skeptical world. **IAJ**

## Notes

1 David L Smith, "Oliver Cromwell and the People of God," Cromwellian (Series III, No. 2, 2013), Ed. Maxine Forsha, <https://www.olivercromwell.org/wordpress/articles/oliver-cromwell-and-the-people-of-god/> accessed January 22, 2025.

2 Anthony Randall, *Practicing Excellence*, (EP House, 2024), 74.

3 Ibid., 58.

4 Ibid., 87.