

## Book Review

### A Higher Standard: Leadership from America's First Female Four-Star General<sup>1</sup>

Reviewed by Major Latisha Irwin\*

*The quality of a leader is reflected in the standards they set for themselves<sup>2</sup>*

#### I. Introduction

One of the first females to attend Airborne school, the first female staff officer at the 82d Airborne Division, the first female general officer assigned to Fort Bragg, and the first female four-star general in the Army;<sup>3</sup> General Ann Dunwoody, U.S. Army, Retired, had a lot of firsts in her career, but she never planned it that way.<sup>4</sup> Dunwoody's book does not tell the reader how to become a general officer or provide a step-by-step guide to being a good leader; instead, it sets out leadership lessons Dunwoody thinks are key to success based on what she has seen in her life and career.<sup>5</sup> Dunwoody illustrates her leadership lessons through her own experiences and failures, and she highlights others as examples of good leaders.<sup>6</sup> She demonstrates her leadership strategies founded on family, education, and fitness.<sup>7</sup> These lessons give insight into her true leadership and make the book imperative for anyone striving to succeed.<sup>8</sup> As Sheryl Sandberg wrote in the forward:

I concluded my book *Lean In* with my hope that "in the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders." I did not know Ann when I wrote that, but she is exactly who I had in mind. What distinguishes Ann is not that she is a woman, but that she is a spectacular and inspiring leader.<sup>9</sup>

#### II. Background

Dunwoody is no stranger to the military or its structure. Her father was a third generation West Point graduate and decorated war hero whom she idolized.<sup>10</sup> Dunwoody and her siblings knew what it meant to be part of a military family.<sup>11</sup> She learned early on that "[her] actions could have negative consequences on [her] father's career, if [she] did something to discredit the family name."<sup>12</sup> Consequently, Dunwoody ensured that she was always on her best behavior and did her best.<sup>13</sup> She excelled in sports and was a self-proclaimed tomboy.<sup>14</sup> Dunwoody never planned on following in her father's footsteps by attending West Point or making the military her choice of career; she was going to be a coach and physical education teacher.<sup>15</sup>

Dunwoody attended the University of New York at Cortland where she competed in collegiate tennis and gymnastics.<sup>16</sup> It was at Cortland that she again crossed paths with the military.<sup>17</sup> She decided to join the Army<sup>18</sup> in order to get five hundred dollars a month and serve a short two-year

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<sup>1</sup> ANN DUNWOODY WITH TOMAGO COLLINS, *A HIGHER STANDARD: LEADERSHIP FROM AMERICA'S FIRST FEMALE FOUR-STAR GENERAL*, (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Brainy Quotes, *Ray Kroc*, BRAINYQUOTE.COM, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/r/raykroc390229.html> (last visited Apr. 30, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> DUNWOODY & COLLINS, *supra* note 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Dunwoody, *Book Discussion on A Higher Standard*, C-SPAN (Apr 28, 2015), <http://www.c-span.org/video/?325756-1/general-ann-dunwoody-higher-standard>.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> DUNWOODY & COLLINS, *supra* note 1, at x.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* Hal Dunwoody is a retired one-star general who fought in World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam. *Id.* at 7. While in combat, he received the Distinguished Service Cross and two Purple Hearts. *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 18.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Alix Steel, *Career Advice From Four-Star Army Gen. Ann Dunwoody*, BLOOMBERG (May 5, 2015, 6:08 PM), <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2015-05-05/career-advice-from-four-star-army-gen-ann-dunwoody>.

<sup>15</sup> Michelle Tan, *First female 4-star shares lessons in 'A Higher Standard'*, ARMYTIMES (May 19, 2015 10:03 AM), <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/officer/2015/05/19/gen-dunwoody-new-leadership-book/27179551/>.

<sup>16</sup> DUNWOODY & COLLINS, *supra* note 1, at 162.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 83-84.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* General Ann Dunwoody commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army Reserve as part of the Women's Officer Orientation course in 1975 before her senior year of college. *Id.*

commitment.<sup>19</sup> The two-year commitment turned into a thirty-eight-year career containing many firsts.<sup>20</sup>

### III. Key Lessons

Readers can take away many thoughts or ideas from Dunwoody's book, but three lessons stand out. First, learn from your mistakes and never walk by a mistake.<sup>21</sup> Second, good leaders are everywhere, find them, and emulate them.<sup>22</sup> Finally, gender does not matter, good is good.<sup>23</sup>

#### A. Mistakes

Dunwoody points out often throughout book that she made mistakes and others helped her learn from them. Her first time performing a speaking role was a disaster.<sup>24</sup> As a battalion adjutant, she had to read aloud an award citation; however, she was unable to speak, and when she did manage to do so, she could only stutter and stammer.<sup>25</sup> Afterwards, to her amazement, her battalion commander told her she would do better next time.<sup>26</sup>

I learned . . . valuable lessons that day. One of those lessons was to be better prepared! Another, just as important, is that nobody is perfect. When leaders help subordinates overcome weaknesses or mistakes, they help the subordinate, they help the organization, and they help themselves become better leaders.<sup>27</sup>

Dunwoody's first public speaking mistake was not her last. She mentioned a few others in her book that can resonate with any reader. Dunwoody's first marriage ended in divorce, and this is something she saw as a failure and a mistake.<sup>28</sup> She felt she had let her Catholic mother and traditional father down.<sup>29</sup> Also Dunwoody failed to qualify on her first

assigned 9mm pistol when she was at the 82d Airborne Division despite previously qualifying on an M-16 rifle and 45-caliber pistol.<sup>30</sup>

Another lesson concerning mistakes is to never walk by one; always correct it.<sup>31</sup> It seems so simple, but it is true that if we do not correct the mistake, it becomes acceptable and the norm. Correcting mistakes is just another way that Dunwoody suggests good leaders hold others accountable for their actions.<sup>32</sup>

#### B. Examples

Dunwoody highlights people throughout the book whom she sees as good examples of leaders. They are everyday people who hold themselves to a higher standard and individuals with whom the reader can identify with and respect. Coach Stokes, a tennis coach at Cortland, taught Dunwoody enduring lessons including, "never confuse enthusiasm with capability," to never give-up, and always believe in yourself.<sup>33</sup> Sergeant First Class Bowen,<sup>34</sup> Lieutenant Dunwoody's platoon sergeant, taught her the power of belief, what right looks like, never walk by a mistake, and be true to yourself.<sup>35</sup> Specialist Giunta, a Medal of Honor recipient, taught her that average, or the standard, is just the starting point because success has no ceiling.<sup>36</sup> Finally, there are her parents; Betty, her mother, instilled in her a values-based system, which is key for any good leader.<sup>37</sup> Betty was the unsung hero in charge of the home front while her father was away fighting wars.<sup>38</sup> Her mother was a devout Catholic, and the most selfless, caring, gracious person in Dunwoody's life who taught her the glass was always half full and no matter the weather, it would never rain on their parade.<sup>39</sup> Her father, Hal, gave her advice that she

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 85.

<sup>20</sup> Dunwoody, *supra* note 4.

<sup>21</sup> DUNWOODY & COLLINS, *supra* note 1, at 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 163.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 23-24.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 3-5.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 58. When Dunwoody's first marriage was falling apart, it made her question everything. *Id.* at 58-63. She started dating Ken, a West Point Graduate, when she was seventeen but she separated from Ken while stationed in Germany. The stress of the situation caused Dunwoody to have a bleeding ulcer, dislike her job, and become depressed. *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 58-63.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 20-21. Dunwoody's husband was the leader and supporter who would not allow her to wallow in self-pity. *Id.* He ensured that the Airmen who shot rifles and pistols in their daily lives properly trained her. *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> DUNWOODY & COLLINS, *supra* note 1, at 20-21.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 163.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 35-39. Sergeant First Class Bowen was Dunwoody's first platoon sergeant and she would later ask him to be her first sergeant when she took command of a maintenance company at Fort Sill in 1978. *Id.* at 35-49. She was the first female to command a maintenance company at Fort Sill. *Id.* at 49.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 35-39.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 30. Specialist Giunta calls himself average and does not feel he is any different from the Soldier standing to his left or right. *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at 10-12.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>39</sup> Dunwoody, *supra* note 4.

lives by everyday: Believe in yourself or no one else will.<sup>40</sup> If you believe in something, do not give up on it, and with the more rank you earn, the more visibility you receive.<sup>41</sup>

### C. Females

Dunwoody mentioned gender throughout the book; however, the lessons were not about gender, but about exceeding the standard and being competent.<sup>42</sup> Dunwoody made it clear that she does not see gender playing a role in her success, she was going to be a success or she would fail.<sup>43</sup> Sergeant First Class Bowen told her that he would, “Make [her] the best platoon leader in the United States Army,”<sup>44</sup> not the best female platoon leader in the United States Army. Dunwoody always strived to exceed the standard. This drive resonates throughout the book and in many of the interviews she has given. She addressed the Marine Corps’ failed attempt at allowing females into their infantry officer course stating, “If it’s about lowering the standards, this policy will have failed . . . This is about identifying the standards and then allowing anyone, male or female, who can meet or exceed those standards give them the opportunity to serve.”<sup>45</sup> She continues to address the need for setting the standard regarding the Department of Defense’s effort to integrate women into combat arms military occupation specialties.<sup>46</sup>

I think it is smart the Army and the military are methodically looking at each one of these branches and career fields to determine what the standard is. They can’t lower those standards, once identified, to accommodate women coming into those fields. That would be a failure. We’re not a social experiment. We’re a war fighting institution, and that’s dangerous business.<sup>47</sup>

Dunwoody fought hard to integrate women into the Army and not have them seen as a segregated section.<sup>48</sup> An example, when Dunwoody returned to Fort Bragg to be the

first female general officer at the installation, another female officer approached her about doing an all-female jump in honor of all the accomplishments of military women.<sup>49</sup> Dunwoody responded with, “I’ve spent my whole career trying to support the integration of women into the Army, and this kind of activity seems to counter that. Don’t get me wrong—I’m so proud that we could even have the opportunity to conduct an all-women event like this.”<sup>50</sup>

Dunwoody is proud of being a female and acknowledges that females in the military have come a long way.<sup>51</sup> Her niece, an A-10 fighter pilot, is an example of a female breaking down the barriers.<sup>52</sup> As is Lieutenant General McQuiston, a fellow general officer who served with Dunwoody.<sup>53</sup> Although Dunwoody is a firm believer in integrating females into the U.S. military, she also feels that female-only sessions allow females to speak freely.<sup>54</sup> They can speak openly about biases, harassment, sexual assaults, and any issues where they might feel hindered in the presence of males.<sup>55</sup>

### IV. Application to Judge Advocates and Others

Judge advocates, Soldiers, and military leaders at every level can learn from *A Higher Standard*. It puts a human face on leadership and instills values that every Soldiers should have. Integrity and courage are front and center in the book and every judge advocate, Soldier, and leader should strive to do “the right thing for the right reasons.”<sup>56</sup> This sound, simple advice applies at all levels and spans the entire military.

The lessons in this book reach beyond the military. The lessons can apply to any large corporation, small business, or to someone who is striving to be a great leader.<sup>57</sup> Dunwoody suggests having a strategic vision, showing every employee how important he or she is to the mission, and making that vision part of everyday leadership practices.<sup>58</sup> She also

<sup>40</sup> DUNWOODY & COLLINS, *supra* note 1, at 23-24.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> *Id.* at 35.

<sup>45</sup> Greg Richter, *Gen. Ann Dunwoody: Don’t Re-Evaluate Military Standards for Women*, NEWSMAX (May 11, 2015, 9:44 AM), <http://www.newsmax.com/Newsmax-Tv/ann-dunwoody-female-soldiers-military/2015/05/11/id/643954/>.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> Tan, *supra* note 15.

<sup>48</sup> DUNWOODY & COLLINS, *supra* note 1, at 156.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* at 156-57.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> Dunwoody, *supra* note 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> DUNWOODY & COLLINS, *supra* note 1, at 80. Lieutenant General McQuiston was a subordinate whom Dunwoody sees as a good officer, leader, and logistician who happens to be female. *Id.* at 80-83. Lieutenant General McQuiston managed to raise three children despite taking unaccompanied assignments. *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> *Id.* at 157-58.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.* at 157.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at 97. Judge advocates have to have integrity and courage because they are arguably the moral compass for commanders.

<sup>57</sup> Steel, *supra* note 14. Dunwoody’s final job commanding the Army Materiel Command qualifies her to give business advice, her budget was sixty million dollars and she was in charge over sixty-nine thousand people. *Id.* This command is relatively the same size as a large Fortune 500 company. *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> DUNWOODY & COLLINS, *supra* note 1, at 179-92.

reiterates never walking by a mistake.<sup>59</sup> Never walking by a mistake has such a broad range of applications. For example, if someone at General Motors had not allowed the mistake of defective ignition switches leaving the factory floor, think of how many lives might have been saved or how much money investors would have saved.<sup>60</sup> If someone at the Department of Veterans Affairs had highlighted the backlog of patients awaiting medical care, how many patients could have been seen or how many more veterans would have been able to receive care?<sup>61</sup>

## V. Conclusion

Dunwoody's book should be on the professional reading list of anyone looking to improve his or her leadership skills. It combines her lessons with personal examples, making them functional and relatable. The personal examples give the reader insight into her life and show that even a four-star general made mistakes, but still managed to succeed. It is evident that to Dunwoody, the cornerstone of her leadership philosophies comes from family, education, and fitness, but *A Higher Standard* goes beyond those, giving the reader easy-to-follow lessons on leadership and making a difference.

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<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> Dunwoody, *supra* note 4.