

The Value of Being Wrong

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Recently I received the results of my comprehensive strategic leadership survey and 360 assessment. The results allowed me not only to see my shortcomings as a leader, but also areas of untapped leadership potential.

One comment stood out: **“Wilson embraces being wrong.”**

Within Army culture, being wrong and failure are synonymous, so I took this comment to heart.

However, after giving it more thought, **the comment reflects the evolution of my leadership philosophy as my responsibilities expand.** I am no longer leading small teams and units comprised solely of soldiers. Rather, today I am working in larger organizations staffed by a diverse workforce and engaged with external agencies.

As a young leader, I was focused upon the performance of my organization and obsessed with perfecting the rational decision making process. Today, I see less value in the development of decision making systems than in bringing together a broad set of stakeholders within and external to the organization to manage problems toward desired outcomes.

As a young leader, I sat at the top of a hierarchical Army organization and used centralized control to guide the team. Today, I see myself as a member of a strategic enterprise working together to solve problems in a complex and volatile environment. As such, I view the development of learning organizations, as described in Senge’s [The Fifth Discipline](#), and decentralization as essential to achieving organizational goals.

This is where embracing of “being wrong” can serve as a positive attribute for public service leaders operating in complex environments. Katherine Schulz, author of [Being Wrong](#), argued that the insatiable pursuit of being right can have a corrosive effect upon organizations. **Alternatively, self-aware leaders who recognize their own limitations are more likely to find ways to tap into the collective power of the team to accomplish goals.**