



# “Tough and Competent” - Gene Kranz



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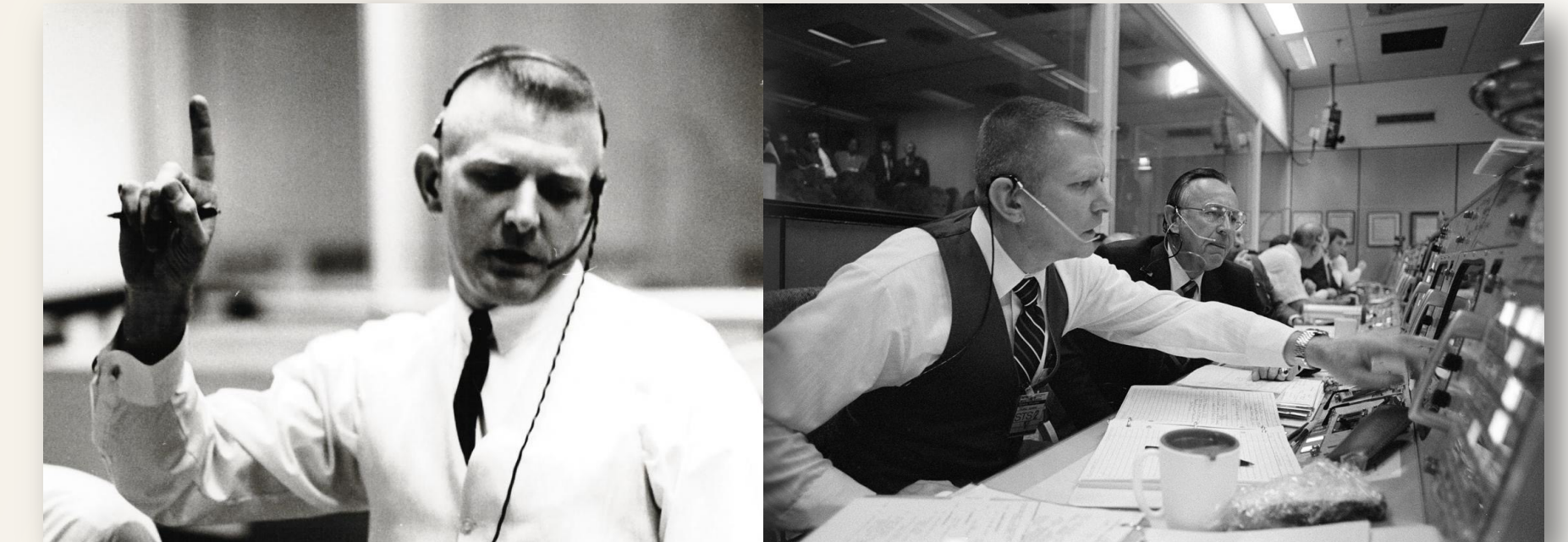
## Abstract

Gene Kranz is an aerospace engineer, former fighter pilot, and retired Flight Director for NASA. He is known for his instrumental role directing the Gemini and Apollo program missions, notably Apollo 11, the first crewed lunar landing mission, and for his role leading the “White Team” during the Apollo 13 crisis. This research into Mr. Kranz’ leadership style will apply various leadership theories to analyze his leadership style. The desired outcome is to illustrate and explain through various leadership concepts and paradigms the *how* and *why* he achieved success throughout his life, and to present these lessons in an understandable and applicable way.



## Major Contributions

- Project Mercury**
  - Procedures Officer: Responsible for initial testing, communication, and command methodologies and procedures.
  - Assigned as Assistant Flight Director. For MA-7
- Gemini Program**
  - Flight Director and branch chief for Flight Control Operations
- Apollo Program**
  - Flight Director through Apollo 17
  - Formed the Apollo 13 “White Team” (Tiger Team).
    - Planned constraints for spacecraft consumables and course correction burns, and power management to allow safe return to Earth.



## Ethics & Servant Leadership

### Ethical Climate:

Ethical climate can be defined as “a set of shared perceptions of procedures and policies, both codified and informal, which shape expectations for ethical behavior within an organization or a company.” (Teresi et al., 2019)

An ethical climate refers to shared perceptions between members of an organization or part of an organization as to “what constitutes right behavior” and arises when “members believe that certain forms of ethical reasoning or behavior are expected standards or norms for decision making within the firm” (Martin & Cullen, 2006)

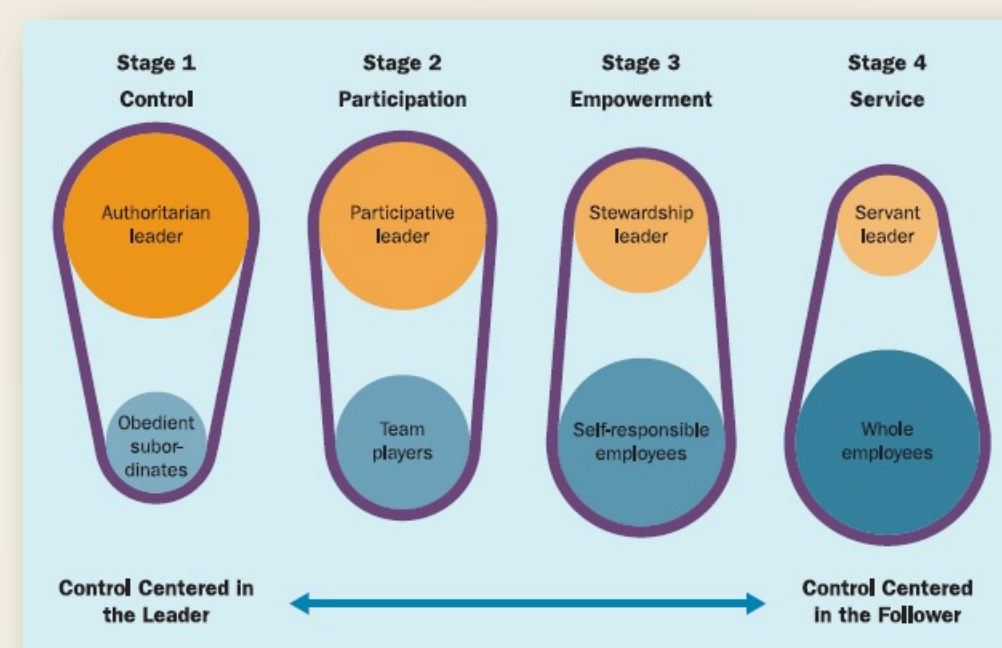
The Ethical Leader	The Unethical Leader
Possesses humility	is arrogant and self-serving
Maintains concern for the greater good	Excessively promotes self-interest
Is honest and straightforward	Practices deception
Fulfills commitments	Breaches agreements
Strives for fairness	Deals unfairly
Takes responsibility	Shifts blame to others
Shows respect for each individual	Diminishes others’ dignity
Encourages and develops others	Neglects follower development
Serves others	Withholds help and support
Shows courage to stand up for what is right	Lacks courage to confront unjust acts

Source: Based on Donald G. Zauderer, “Integrity: An Essential Executive Quality,” *Business Forum* (Fall 1992), pp. 12–16.

### Servant Leadership:

“The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.” (Greenleaf, 2008)

“Servant leaders understand how to build a workplace culture where teams and community are valued. And people want that real feeling of community in the workplace because they don’t have it in their lives.” (Purdue University Global, 2020)



## Courage & Followership

### Courage:

Gene Kranz demonstrates several Tenets of Courage during his career at NASA’s Mission Control. The Tenets of Courage, as defined by Daft (2011) are as follows:

- The Courage to Assume Responsibility
- The Courage to Challenge
- The Courage to Participate in Transformation
- The Courage to Serve
- The Courage to Leave

Specifically, the Courage to Assume Responsibility stands out as one of Kranz’ primary courageous attributes. Kranz was assigned Assistant Flight Director for Project Mercury upon arrival to the NASA Space Task Group in Langley Virginia in 1960 (NASA, n.d.) His boss, Chris Kraft, surprised him with the job to head down to the Mercury Launch facility, “Everyone else is tied up. You’re all I’ve got. We’re coming up on our first Redstone launch. I’d like you to go down to the Cape, get with the test conductors and write a countdown. Then write some mission rules. When you finish give me a call and we’ll come down and start training.” Kranz dove headlong into the task, “defining the joint tests of control and communications systems, as well as the Go/No-Go points for telemetry display, command, and communications in Mercury Control” (Kranz, 2000).

### Followership:

The concept of followership is extensively explored in Kranz autobiography. He details the high-performance relationships within Mission Control, the Remote Sites, and NASA leadership.

“Followership is a reciprocal process of leadership that refers to the willingness to follow within a team or organization. The follower accepts their role in followership based on two types of power from the leader or manager: positional power and personal power” (Duran-Stanton & Masson, 2021).

Followership is a key component of a successful organization. A leader is useless without followers, or a team to lead. Effective followers can be characterized by independent thinking, being active within an organization, supporting and challenging their leader, and working toward the best interests of the organization as a whole (Daft, 2011).

Desirable Leaders Are	Desirable Colleagues (Followers) Are
Honest	Honest
Forward-thinking	Cooperative
Inspiring	Dependable
Competent	Competent

## Key Takeaway

- The main takeaway of studying Gene Kranz’ professional life and career is the interaction and interdependency of patriotism, confidence, courage, leadership/followership to produce one of the most influential and effective leaders in NASA’s history. His leadership style can be best captured in his famous “Tough and Competent” speech known as the “Kranz Dictum” given in the aftermath of the Apollo 1 tragedy:

*“From this day forward, Flight Control will be known by two words: ‘Tough’ and ‘Competent.’ Tough means we are forever accountable for what we do or what we fail to do. We will never again compromise our responsibilities. Every time we walk into Mission Control we will know what we stand for. Competent means we will never take anything for granted. We will never be found short in our knowledge and in our skills. Mission Control will be perfect. When you leave this meeting today you will go to your office and the first thing you will do there is to write ‘Tough and Competent’ on your blackboards. It will never be erased. Each day when you enter the room these words will remind you of the price paid by Grissom, White, and Chaffee. These words are the price of admission to the ranks of Mission Control.”*

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