"I lead by example."

My name is Maggie Ayres. I’m an Air Force Veteran, and I’m the cemetery director for San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery, which is located in Santa Nella, California. I have overall responsibility for planning, programming, coordinating and directing the administration and operation of this 322 acre national cemetery.

It’s my mission to honor Veterans and their families with final resting places in a national shrine with lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to our nation. We pledge here at San Joaquin Valley to honor the dignity and memory of each person and provide excellent service to families and friends during this most difficult time. After all, we only have one opportunity to get this right – there are no do-overs in NCA.

I believe that integrity is a core value and I cherish and try to live by it every day. One way I stress integrity in the workplace is through accountability. If we make a mistake, we must be transparent. We must accept responsibility and immediately correct the mistake.

As the director, I set the standard for what is expected, and I lead by example. I always insist on honesty in all dealings, because honesty encourages open communication, which leads to effective relationships within the cemetery.

I’m especially proud of my team. San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery was recently rated among the top five national cemeteries in NCA, based on performance measures and customer service.

I’d like to encourage leaders to demonstrate integrity by becoming role models for living our organization’s values. And they can accomplish this by walking the talk. Being an example of what you want your employees to be. Being sure that your performance reflects the best standards. Also, it’s important to develop a code of conduct in your workplace that defines expectations concerning integrity and ethical behavior. And finally, I think you should demonstrate pride in your organization.

Living a life with integrity and displaying a consistency in principles, values and actions is something every leader should strive for. It doesn’t matter whether someone is watching us. It’s who we are. It’s a core value.