

TAKING THE GUIDON



Exceptional Leadership
at the
Company Level

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Taking the Guidon: Exceptional Leadership at the Company Level

We wrote this book to capture our ideas about how to best prepare for and command a U.S. Army company-level unit. In the book, we lay out a leadership framework that was effective for us and, based on feedback from readers, is making a difference in how others think about leading. One of the best things that emerged out of our desire to serve Company Commanders was the idea for creating CompanyCommand.com and PlatoonLeader.org, but that is another story.

Here is an excerpt from the preface that introduces the book:

Combat is the ultimate team sport; the cost of losing is death. As an Army leader, your mission is to build a winning team of disciplined, fit, and motivated soldiers that will accomplish the mission. In this book, you will find some input into to the age-old dialogue on how to create a team and harness its energy to accomplish uncommon results.

Leading soldiers is our inspiration; doing so has affected every part of our lives. To begin with, the knowledge that we would command a company motivated us to prepare doggedly for command. This book is a compilation of our research and thinking, validated by experience (both success and failure!). It is not meant to be prescriptive in nature; nor will all these ideas work for you and your situation. Rather, our intent is to spark your thinking and encourage you as you prepare for command.

We were fortunate to work with and watch some great leaders in action and to learn from some challenging experiences. Now we are in a position to pass on some of what we have learned. Our desire is that reading this book motivates and challenges you while you prepare for and execute the most honorable mission in the world--leading American soldiers!

Finally, people wonder about the title of the book. We wrote this to explain that:

Significance of the title, *Taking the Guidon*

The unit guidon serves to identify the unit, is a symbol of the commander's authority and presence, and represents the collective pride and spirit of all soldiers—past and present—who have served under it. Historically, the guidon accompanied the commander into battle where, in the heat and confusion of the close fight, it emboldened and rallied the soldiers to accomplish the mission.

Today, the unit guidon continues to be an honored symbol of the commander's authority and responsibility, and it connects the valorous deeds of past warriors with today's soldiers who continue the proud tradition of selfless service to our Nation.

An Army unit conducts a change-of-command ceremony whenever a new commander takes charge. The central rite of this ceremony is the passing of the unit guidon from the outgoing commander to the incoming commander. By taking the guidon, the new commander signals his or her selfless commitment to the traditions, values, and soldiers that the guidon represents.

CHAPTER 1 -- LEADERSHIP

Section 1. Learning – Prior To and During Command

You will always be what you have always been, if
you always do what you have always done.

Company command is a phenomenal leadership experience. Commanding 120+ soldiers — potentially in combat — is a responsibility that is quite humbling if you stop to think about it. It is an extremely challenging, sometimes lonely experience that will test your mettle, give you incredible satisfaction, and push you beyond your abilities. You will pour your soul into it and, in the end, you will join the thousands who remember it as the most professionally rewarding experience of their lives.

You may have seen how companies often take on the personalities of their commanders. Some have said that an organization is a shadow of its leader; it takes a “big” leader to cast a big shadow. Because the company commander has so much power and responsibility, he or she can easily become a “lid” on the company’s level of effectiveness.¹

While a lot of leadership springs from innate ability, character, and personality, there is a large element of leadership supported by skill and knowledge. It is important to be aware that there is a significant jump in leadership complexity from platoon leading to company commanding. The skill and knowledge that worked for you at the platoon level will not necessarily work at the company level.

Learning will not just happen—you must be committed to developing yourself as you prepare for command, and also *while* you command. The time to start preparing for company command is right now. If you are satisfied with yourself as you are, we feel confident in saying that you won’t be the commander that you could be.

¹ John Maxwell calls this the “Law of the Lid: leadership ability determines a person’s level of effectiveness.” John Maxwell. *The 21 Most Powerful Minutes in a Leader’s Day*, 2000: p. 1.

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In this section, we will give you a few practical ideas that will help you better prepare for and command your unit. You can do three concrete things to increase your effectiveness. These are: writing down ideas for future use, committing yourself to read about leadership, and taking advantage of other commanders' experiences. Think of these techniques as learning combat multipliers that will "lift the lid" of your leadership capacity.

Write Your Ideas Down (Leader Notebook)

Start a "command idea" section in your leader notebook. In this section include ideas that you think of, see in action, or hear about that you might want to use while in command. Most good ideas disappear into the ether of lost thoughts unless you get them down on paper. One thought written down will later lead you to another thought that you never would have discovered without the first. In other words, reflecting upon previous thoughts often opens the door to other ideas. The implied task is that you actually review your notes and don't get caught up in the "tyranny of the urgent" as you take command, forgetting that your notes ever existed.

Our own notebooks are filled with ideas from our time as lieutenants, notes taken during OPDs, and our company command brainstorming sessions during the Captains' Career Course. These notes proved invaluable as we prepared for and commanded our companies. Many of the things we captured in our notebooks have ended up on the pages of this book.

Read (Professional Reading)

We hear a lot about professional reading being important to your development as an officer; it is even more critical to your preparation for command. Read as much as you possibly can on leadership, and take notes while you read. Bottom line: Whether or not you like reading, doing it is essential to both your preparation for command and your continued learning while in command. Taking notes while you read will ensure the

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knowledge you gain is not lost once you finish the book.² A fantastic resource for professional reading is the “Cmd Reading” section of the CompanyCommand.com Web site. The section offers ideas on developing a professional reading program for your subordinates, several recommended reading lists, links to on-line journals, book reviews, and comments from officers on how certain books impacted their ability to lead effectively.

Seek Advice and Counsel

It is crucial to take advantage of the experience of others. Why go into command on your experiences alone when you can go in with the collective experiences of many? On the top of your list will be your fellow commanders, your Battalion Commander, XO, S3, and CSM. Most importantly, seek out the outgoing commanders who probably know more about company command in your division than anyone else. Officers who depart command typically head off within days to some post-command assignment without ever sharing their experiences with up-and-coming commanders. This is a crime! Seek them out. We found that they will talk your ear off about the things that really excited them during command. Take a departing commander out to lunch a couple of times and “grill him” on leadership ideas. Let him know what the lunch will be about so he can think about it beforehand. Those coming out of command or other leadership positions love to talk about their experiences, are eager to share their ideas, and will often give you practical tools to use. Ask insightful questions like:

- What training really paid big dividends?
- What techniques helped you personally to be effective in the field?
- What is one thing you implemented that made a difference?

² Publishing your notes for your lieutenants is a great complement to your OPD program. They will not only learn from your notes, but they will learn how you think; additionally, they will be inspired by your reading example.

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- If you could have focused more on one area, what would it have been?
- What really motivated the unit and helped build a winning team?
- How did you incorporate a combined arms focus in your training?

Seeking counsel is a way to learn things that you can apply right away that you might never have thought of or might not have figured out until much later on in your command.

Additionally, while you are in command, there is usually another commander doing something smarter, better, or more effectively than you. Don't let pride keep you from borrowing great ideas. Be a team player, constantly sharing your ideas with the other commanders around you, and help create a positive climate amongst your peers.

Get off your duff and make the time to meet with and/or to write letters to the one or two officers who most impressed you but are currently stationed elsewhere. Seeking out knowledge from those around you is one simple thing you can do that will have a tremendous impact on your time in command.³

Summary

You must be committed to continual learning because if you aren't moving forward, you are moving backwards. This is true not only as you prepare for and command your unit, but even after you pass the guidon to the next commander. Learning includes organizing and thinking about command ideas, reading and reflecting, and actively soliciting input from experienced leaders around you. You owe it to yourself and your soldiers to do so with gusto.

³ Prior to taking the guidon, we created a resource book of things like command philosophies, OER Support Forms, and Company TACSOPs. Log onto www.CompanyCommand.com to get all kinds of great ideas from current and former company commanders. We also encourage you to contact recent company commanders directly via the "Cmd Contacts" section of the Web site. Don't miss an opportunity to be better prepared to command your unit!

Section 2. Natural Laws of Leadership

You may not believe in gravity or even be aware of it. However, when you drop a rock, it still falls.⁴ Similarly, there are laws that govern our ability to lead effectively. They appear obvious and yet, because they are so often disregarded, we feel compelled to share them with you in this section. Moreover, these “laws” help clarify our approach to command in all areas from leader development to training to building a positive command climate. It doesn’t take much to agree that they are true, but it takes a lot to have the discipline required to align yourself with them. It is the difference between success and failure.

The Farming Law

The farming law—**you reap what you sow**—is obvious but regularly ignored. A farmer who wants to reap a productive harvest in the fall must plant in the spring and work the fields through the summer. Just like it would be ridiculous for a farmer to skip all the hard work and still expect to harvest, there are no short-term fixes in creating winning teams.

- If you want to do well on the PT test, you must overload on pushups and sit-ups and focus your running on “speed work” far enough out to reasonably achieve the results you desire. The leader must plan the PT test at the most opportune time (you will never find the perfect time), communicate the fact that the PT test is coming up, issue the challenge to excel (most soldiers will rise to a challenge), and then ensure everyone remains focused on the goal until the test date arrives.
- If you want to be ready during the “Squad Enter and Clear a Room Live Fire” that is coming up, you have to conduct quality leader training to ensure that all your leaders are

⁴ Stephen R. Covey. *Principle Centered Leadership*, 1990: p. 18.

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on the same sheet of music and prepared to train their soldiers. What are the individual skills that must be understood in order to do well at the collective task? Do we have a company SOP on this training that is clearly understood by all the leaders? Remember that an SOP is not an SOP until it is known and understood by all. If you want to really frustrate your squad leaders, let them train their soldiers for half a day until you see that you don't like some of their techniques and then pull the leaders together to figure out the way you want to do business.

- If you want to excel on marksmanship, quit “checking the block”; develop a quality program that builds from the basics and gives the soldiers time on the trigger.

Quick fixes rarely fix anything! Leading, like farming, is hard work. The harvest—victory on the battlefield, changed lives, tomorrow's leaders—makes the hard work worthwhile.

The 24-Hour Law and the Big Rocks Metaphor

Ok, we know that there just isn't enough time to do it **all**. In fact, the 24-hour law—**there is a finite amount of time in a day**—tells us that it *all* can't get done. However, if you have figured out what the “big rocks” are for your outfit, you can be focused on what is important and not waste time worrying about what doesn't really matter in the long run. Stephen Covey, in his book *First Things First*, tells a story that explains what a big rock is.⁵ At a seminar, the instructor pulled out a jar and asked the students how many rocks he could fit in the jar. After filling up the jar with rocks, he asked if it was full. Of course, it appeared to be full until he poured a large cup of gravel into the jar. After then pouring another cup of fine sand into the jar, the students began to understand the point he was making:

⁵ Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill and Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First*, 1994: p. 88-89.

Figure out the important things and put them in your life first (*first things first*).

The alternative is to let the “small” but often urgent stuff fill up the jar, not allowing any of the big rocks to fit in at all. We have talked to several commanders who were frustrated following their time in command. They felt as if they were treading water during their commands and were never able to accomplish the things they intuitively knew were important. They had allowed the urgent but not really important things to dominate their calendars.



Put the “big rocks” in first



Otherwise, your jar will fill up with sand

Of course, first you must actually know what the big rocks are. Once you know what they are, place them on the calendar, to include everything that must come first to make it a quality product/event—something that will yield superior results. The things that are not big rocks for the outfit will often still need to get done; however, you will purposefully not invest the same time and effort into them. The key to success here is communication with the company and, if necessary, with your boss. If your leaders are a part of developing what the big rocks are in the company and fully understand what is going on, they will no longer be frustrated when a “little rock” event isn’t so hot. In fact, they will be motivated because they will have a newfound

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sense of satisfaction knowing that the things they think are important are being planned and executed to a high standard.

This is not a new idea for the Army. The METL concept goes right along with this approach. Hone down the myriad of tasks that we train on to the few collective tasks that are the most important: the “big rocks” for the outfit.

It sounds pretty simple. However, it takes truly disciplined planning and hard work to ensure you allocate time on the calendar for those things that build towards a successful event, whatever that event may be. Remember that—like the farmer—you will reap what you sow.

You can always see people’s real priorities by the way they spend their resources—if you look at their calendars and checkbooks, you can identify the real priorities. The same is true for your unit. Look at your calendar and other resources to see if there is alignment between your vision and where your resources are going. If there is not alignment, it is time to make some changes. Too often we jam stuff onto the calendar because it briefs well or sounds like a great idea, but it simply does not fit within the unit’s vision. If it doesn’t fit, get rid of it—period, with no looking back. **Just as you tailor a soldier’s load for the mission, so you must tailor your calendar to fit your vision. Be careful not to put too much in your “rucksack.”**

On this note, before you take command ask yourself this question: “What are those things that only I can and must do in my role as commander?” We think it is important that you wrestle with this question, and then get feedback from a friend or mentor who has commanded already. Every commander will have a different answer—the key is to identify these items and then turn your subordinate leaders loose on the other things. Ensure a “system” is established for each of the critical aspects of your unit and that someone is responsible to manage that system (i.e., “pin the rose” on someone). We referred to the areas that we were not going to delegate responsibility for as our “big three.” Here is one example of a commander’s “big three”: Leader Development/Leader Training, Training Management, and Physical Fitness. There are only 24 hours in a day, 365 days

in a year. Figure out what is really important and put your energy into getting it done.

Summary

In this section we have talked about natural laws and have used the farming law, the 24-hour law, and the “big rock” metaphor to bring out some fundamental truths that apply to effectively leading your organization. Commitment to excellence will require the discipline to prioritize, plan, and inspire your subordinates to do the same. This is what great company-level leaders do.

Section 3. Vision

“There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future, widely shared.”⁶

Know Yourself First

The first Army Leadership Principle is *know yourself and seek self-improvement*. We believe that the know-yourself part of this principle is fundamental to your success as a leader and is the beginning of creating vision. If, in fact, self-knowledge really is the basis of all other knowledge,⁷ leaders must take time out to study themselves. You do this by reflecting on where you have been and who you are, by considering what is really important, and by imagining the future. A perfect time to do this is during your Captains’ Career Course, and it is especially important just prior to assuming command. If we were kings for a day, we would give every captain two weeks off prior to taking command. These weeks would be a time to reflect and prepare for the upcoming journey. Of course, this rarely happens;

⁶ Burt Nanus, *Visionary Leadership*, 1992: p. 3.

⁷ Stephen Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 1989: p. 40.

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instead, officers are usually rushed from one job to the next. All too often, captains continue to be weighed down with “urgent” issues in their current staff jobs even while they conduct inventories and prepare to lead their new companies. Force yourself to take at least a long weekend prior to taking command to read, reflect, imagine, and mentally prepare for the challenge ahead.

The Army’s 11 Leadership Principles⁸

1. **Know Yourself** and Seek Self-Improvement
2. Be Technically and Tactically Proficient
3. Seek Responsibility and Take Responsibility For Your Actions
4. Make Sound and Timely Decisions
5. Set the Example
6. Know Your Soldiers and Look Out For Their Well-Being
7. Keep Your Soldiers Informed
8. Develop A Sense Of Responsibility In Your Subordinates
9. Ensure That The Task Is Understood, Supervised, and Accomplished
10. Train Your Soldiers As a Team
11. Employ Your Unit In Accordance With Its Capabilities

Self-Study Techniques

It is easy to say that you need to study yourself; it is much more difficult to actually do so. Here are a few techniques that may help you reflect, know yourself better, project forward, and envision the future. We recommend doing all of them and even sharing your personal insights with a friend. The first technique to get you started is to write down what you think makes a great commander. You could write a short essay or just brainstorm on paper using bullet comments. Think back to those leaders who had a positive impact on you and consider why they were effective. After the list is complete, take a break. When you

⁸ “Leaders who view these principles as the bedrock of their leadership will build effective units—composed of soldiers with skill and will who work together as a team to accomplish the mission.” Dandridge M. Malone, *Small Unit Leadership*, 1983: p. 34.

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come back to it, eliminate all but the top five attributes. You are imagining the ideal commander. If you get stuck, think about those things that make a “bad” commander to get you going again. This process helps you to see what you value in a leader and helps you envision what you want to be like as a commander.

What makes a commander?	
<u>Ideal Commander or Leader</u>	<u>Bad Commander or Leader</u>

Another exercise is to write out your strengths and weaknesses. Remember that no one will see this, so be honest with yourself. What are you good at? What are you passionate about? What gets you really excited and gives you great satisfaction? “People’s passions flow naturally into creating something that truly excites them.”⁹ What contribution would you be excited about making? We believe that you can make the greatest difference in your company by understanding your strengths, and then making full use of them whenever possible.

What are you not so good at? What gets you angry or sets you off? What one thing frustrates you the most? Understanding your weaknesses will help you to know what areas you need to improve upon, what areas you might delegate, and what types of subordinates would help round you out. If you are honest and identify areas that need improvement, you can decide to change and take steps towards growing as a leader.

⁹ Peter Senge, “The Practice of Innovation,” *Leader to Leader Journal*, Summer 1998: p. 5.

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Knowing Myself	
<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>

Comparing and contrasting the results of these first two exercises might prove valuable to you as you seek to better know yourself.

Remember that those things that are strengths can in fact become weaknesses in different circumstances. A great leader will consider how a new job and a different situation might require a leadership approach different than what worked in the last job or circumstance.

One other powerful way to understand yourself as a leader is to imagine that you have completed your command. Your soldiers, NCOs, and officers are hanging out talking about you. What would you *like* them to say about you? Take the time to write out what you would ideally like each of them to say. Once you are finished, think through what you will actually need to do in order to get to that idealized end state. You might find it beneficial to expand this exercise to include your 1SG, fellow company commanders, your battalion commander, and any other important people in your life. This exercise has the potential to clearly show you what you think is important. In addition, the results can serve as an azimuth by which you evaluate your future actions.

What would I want them to say about me?	
Reviewer	Comments
Soldiers	
NCOs	
Officers	

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Have a designated notebook for these ideas, so that they are organized and handy. During your time in command, you can review the notebook and add to it using real examples that will help you understand yourself in an even deeper way. This self-reflection throughout your time in command will serve as a sort of personal azimuth check.

Finally, we encourage you to share the results of your self-study with a trusted friend or mentor. This will be especially valuable if this person has already commanded a company.

Vision Framework

What kind of company do you want to be a part of creating? As you continue preparing for company command, you will want to start thinking seriously about this question. The depth of your self-knowledge will play a big part in your ability to effectively do this. We believe that you should develop your personal vision for command, and then, once you take command, take your leaders through this same process in order to create a compelling, shared vision. The vision framework that has worked for us and that we will take you through is:

Vision = Purpose + Envisioned Future + Core Values¹⁰

We began this section on vision with a great quotation that communicates the power that vision can have on a unit. But so what? How does this apply to you personally?

Exceptional leadership is always rooted in genuine, passionate commitment. Exceptional units emerge when the people of the unit are passionately committed to what they are doing. On the one hand, there is the leader—you—and on the other hand, there are the followers—your soldiers. Where does the passionate commitment that you find in exceptional leaders

¹⁰ See Peter Senge, “The Practice of Innovation,” *Leader to Leader Journal*, Summer 1998; and Collins, James and Jerry Porras, *Built To Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, 1994.

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and units come from? It always begins with vision. The next two sections will provide you some practical ideas on how you can uncover vision in yourself—personal vision—and in your company—shared vision. We believe the process will unleash the kind of passionate commitment that you want in your company.

Personal Vision: Purpose, Envisioned Future, Core Values

First, ask yourself, “What is the **purpose** of the unit I am going to command?” Why does the unit exist? Vision that is not grounded in a clear purpose will often be arbitrary and lack meaning, so spend some quality time thinking through this important question.

What is the purpose of my unit?

Second, **envision the future**. Vision can be defined as “a picture of the future we seek to create.”¹¹ One way to get at this is to describe a great unit. What is it like? An even more powerful way to get at this is to describe a unit that you would be excited about being in. Fill in the blank in this statement: If my company is like _____, I will really be inspired. Imagine the future and ask yourself why someone would want to be in your company. This activity will help you get at what you value, and it will begin to tap into your own passionate commitment.

¹¹ Peter Senge, “The Practice of Innovation,” *Leader to Leader Journal*, Summer 1998: p. 5.

Envisioned Future: The unit I would be psyched about commanding.

Imagine that it is one year from the day you take command. You just ran PT with one of your squads, walked around your company area, watched a platoon live-fire exercise, and attended a company party. Pick up a pen and paper and describe what you witnessed. You are envisioning what you would like your unit to “look like, feel like, and be like when you and others have completed the journey.”¹²

The third part of building your vision is defining **core values**. Core values describe how the company wants life to be on a day-to-day basis while pursuing the vision. Ask yourself, “How do we want to act, consistent with our purpose, along the path toward achieving our vision? Core values are only helpful if they can be translated into concrete behaviors.”¹³ What are the most important values of this company? Brainstorm and then hone down your list, seeking to make it as succinct as possible. You want to create a focused beam of light—a set of values that are truly “core” and clearly define how the company lives—that can burn a hole through a wall. Avoid a laundry list of values that diffuses the light and weakly illuminates an entire wall.

What are the core values that drive behavior in this company?

¹² James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 1995: p. 96.

¹³ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 1990: p. 224.

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Is this hard work? Yes—and well worth every minute of it! Some will read this and wonder if anyone actually does this kind of stuff. Is it too “touchy, feely”? We believe that awesome units begin with leaders who are passionately committed to an attractive and worthwhile vision. This is where exceptional leadership begins.

In fact, there are hundreds of examples of commanders who are doing or have done exactly what we have described here and, in the process, have inspired some heroic results. Two examples from our not-too-distant past include a company commander during the Korean War, Ralph Puckett, and a battalion commander during the Vietnam War, Hal Moore. We have had the privilege of listening to both speak; most of you will know the latter from his book, *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young*.

Colonel (Retired) Ralph Puckett, Ranger Hall of Fame inductee, gives an inspiring talk about his experience building a winning team of warriors during the Korean War.¹⁴ While still a 1LT, he was selected to command the newly formed 8th Army Ranger Company. He built a combat-ready team from scratch, and he led it until he was seriously wounded. When he tells you about his personal vision for what he wanted the company to be, you feel his passionate commitment bursting out; we would have loved being in his unit! Quite simply, he told his company,

We are:

- Physical Tigers
- Tactically and technically proficient
- A Killing Machine
- *The* best unit—every soldier believes it!

He went on to say that company commanders build winning teams by setting and demanding adherence to high standards, concentrating on fundamentals, and creating a unit climate where every soldier is comfortable providing feedback focused on improving everything, including the CO’s performance. Finally,

¹⁴ Colonel (Retired) Ralph Puckett, speeches at Ft Benning, Georgia on 1 February 1995 and Schofield Barracks, Hawaii on 11 January 1996.

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he recommended stressing the leaders during training so that they would be prepared for the high stress that comes during combat.

Hal Moore took over 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry having already developed a vision for what a great battalion would look like. In *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young*, LTC Moore describes his first day in command: “In a brief talk to the troops afterward I told them that this was a good battalion but it would get better. ‘I will do my best,’ I said. ‘I expect the same from each of you.’” His vision was to build a winning team. He began communicating this from the day he took command. In his first talk with the officers of the battalion, he gave this guidance:

Only first-place trophies will be displayed, accepted, or presented in this battalion. Second place in our line of work is defeat of the unit on the battlefield, and death for the individual in combat.¹⁵

You can imagine the energy he created during his first day in command. Of course, he went on to live his creed and to inspire a shared commitment to victory. Read *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young* and you will see how LTC Moore’s vision impacted the soldiers and leaders of the battalion and led to incredible results in combat.

Tony Nadal commanded Alpha Company during the battle of LZ X-Ray. In his comments below you will find further insight into how LTC Moore created a winning team, and just some plain old good advice for up-and-coming company commanders:

He did have a clear vision of wanting to command the best battalion in the Army, and he quickly set the tone. He often reinforced his views in talks to his officers and troops. His comments about no second-place trophies permeated everything that the battalion did. He was always leading by example, setting the tone, and demanding the best. One of his most important messages

¹⁵ Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young*, 1992:
p. 18-19.

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before we deployed to Vietnam was that no soldier, dead or wounded, would be left on the battlefield. This was very important to the soldiers and we indeed acted on that value. One of his characteristics was to always be where the action was the hottest and not to expect nor accept creature comforts that his soldiers didn't have. One of the messages all new commanders have to realize is that command is a position of responsibility, not privilege.¹⁶

You must capture this same passionate commitment as you describe what you want your company to be like. Do you want to command an awesome unit? Then begin imagining what that unit will be like. The stories of Puckett and Moore are part of our rich heritage; your story will become a part of our history too. What will your legacy be?

You will want to take the guidon having already done what we have described here—unleashing your own passionate commitment by developing a clear sense of purpose, picture of the future, and core values. In addition, you will want to take command ready to articulate this to your unit. Publishing a command philosophy and conducting initial meetings with your leaders and soldiers are methods to immediately begin communicating your vision and passionate commitment.

We are both infantry officers, and we planned on taking command of rifle companies. While at the Captains Career Course, we began developing our personal vision for command. We started by thinking through the purpose of our units. In a rifle company, it is easy to understand that the bottom line is killing the enemy, and it doesn't take much convincing to get your soldiers to see this. Soldiers want to be on the winning team, plain and simple. The driving question for us as we considered company command became: "What does a winning rifle company look like?"

Based on our experience, we knew that success in any organization hinges on *Leadership*. "The strength of any organization is a direct result of the strength of its leaders. Weak

¹⁶ Tony Nadal, interview with Nate Allen and Tony Burgess, 24 February, 2001.

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leaders equal weak organizations. Strong leaders equal strong organizations. Everything rises and falls on leadership.”¹⁷

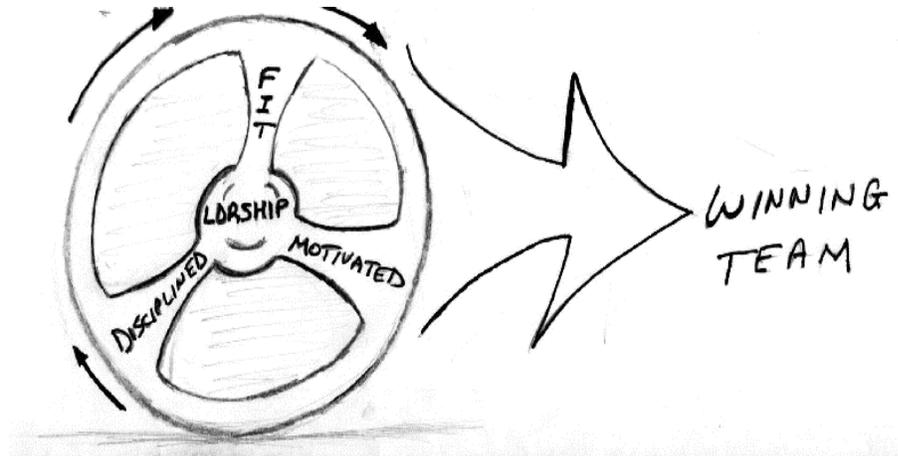
Once we clarified leadership as the force that would power our winning team, we worked to describe the other key components that make up a winning team. After many drafts and a lot of energy spent, we concluded that **winning teams are disciplined, fit, and motivated**. To win, we had to be *Disciplined* and able to perform our mission. The Latin root word of the word discipline means “to learn” and implies that disciplined units are learning units that pay the price required to develop skilled competence. A common theme running through all accounts of combat is the need to be *Physically Fit*. Combat veterans almost to the man comment on how much more incredibly exhausting combat is, both physically and mentally, than they could have imagined. If your soldiers are going to grab the enemy by the nose and kick him in the tail-end, they must be physical maniacs. Finally, great combat teams are *Motivated*. This is driven by loyalty, teamwork, and care for one another and the knowledge that each individual is a meaningful part of something significant.

Out of all this flowed a vision statement that inspired us as we continued to prepare for command: **We are a winning team: a cohesive band of disciplined, fit, and motivated warriors that can destroy any enemy.**

Pictures often say more than words alone. We used a wheel metaphor to help us communicate our vision (see diagram below). Because leadership would power our team and make all forward movement possible, the hub of the wheel represented it. The main spokes of the wheel represented the other components of our winning team framework. Using the metaphor, one can see how bumpy the ride might be if one of the spokes is out of alignment or not as strong as it needs to be. And you can see that no movement would be possible at all without leadership.

¹⁷ John Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, 1995: p. 6.

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We arrived in command ready to articulate this for the company. Our passionate commitment couldn't help but shine through because we were so excited about what we were doing. The day we assumed command, we provided our leaders with a memorandum that described our vision (see an example on page 57). The memo served to focus our own thinking about command. In addition, it communicated where we wanted to take the company. We used this same framework—leadership driven, disciplined, fit, and motivated—in our initial meetings with the soldiers and leaders, in our initial counseling sessions, as the basis for our OER support forms, and in the way we framed our company goals.¹⁸ This book, by the way, is organized in the same way.

Shared Vision: Purpose, Envisioned Future, Core Values

Ok, first you develop your personal vision and take the guidon ready to begin communicating that vision. Since your personal vision is really about who you are and what you think is important, everything you do will end up communicating it (hopefully, who you are and what you think is important are

¹⁸ Another framework that many officers use for OER support forms is: Leading, Training, Maintaining, Caring. We are not necessarily advocating our framework, but we do believe it is critical to have one.

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aligned). However, you will at the same time want to shift your efforts towards developing a *shared* vision. Are we contradicting ourselves here? No, our experience proves otherwise.

Leaders with a vision provide an azimuth and create energy about what the team stands for. However, their biggest challenge is communicating the vision in such a way that it inspires the organization. Imposing your vision might not be the best way to tap into your unit's passionate commitment. The latent energy of the outfit might best be unleashed when the vision—purpose, envisioned future, and core values—comes from within your soldiers themselves. Peter Senge underscores this approach: “The practice of a shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance.”¹⁹

What we are suggesting is that you take your leaders through the same process that you personally went through. Have them think through and articulate purpose, envisioned future, and core values. Not only will this tap into their passionate commitment—it will also further energize you and ensure your ideas are on track. If you are questioning this approach, just turn the tables and imagine how inspired you would be if your boss went through this process with you. At the end of the day, we are most committed to those things that we are part of creating. Let your soldiers be a part of this creation process, and you will be absolutely amazed at the results.

Your work should result in some kind of overall statement that describes the company vision. Write this in terms that soldiers can relate to—use words and images that are meaningful to them. Post the vision statement in front of the company and refer to it at every opportunity (key training events, when confronted with change, during AARs and training meetings, etc.) You can see how much more powerful it will be if the unit creates the statement rather than you telling them what it is. Here is an example of the vision statement and core values that Nate and his leaders developed:

¹⁹ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 1990: p. 9.

Example Company Vision

QUICKSTRIKE VISION:

Quickstrike is a cohesive band of warriors who are disciplined, fit, and motivated. We possess the skill, will, and teamwork required to destroy any enemy.

CORE VALUES:

- We are known as Live Fire Experts
- Our PT program is Battle Focused. We create physical maniacs.
- We care for our soldiers and families with a passion.
- We are known for our disciplined field craft.
- Our officers and NCOs are renowned for their hard-nosed discipline and expertise.

Nate then had his platoon leaders take the refined company vision statement and core values and, with their respective platoon leadership, draft the same for their platoons, thus taking it down to the lowest level of the outfit and creating alignment within the organization.

Remember that the initial concept is a starting point and not the *end-all* answer. Too many command philosophies and vision statements are published on day one and are never referred to again. Leadership is a process, just as creating a vision is a process that will continue to develop during your command. Therefore, do not worry about creating the “perfect” statement. The ultimate sign of success here is that the vision becomes a part of your unit culture and helps you move towards the future you desire. Use the vision statement to guide your decisions, and it

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will become an energizing factor in your organization. Leaders who put a memo on the wall speak softly; leaders who actually make daily decisions based on the unit vision create a deafening roar.

In closing, it is important to note that an inspiring, shared vision will “pull” you into the future if and only if you have the discipline to continually compare it with your current reality. We recommend—at a minimum of once a quarter—evaluating whether your team is in alignment with the vision (See Leader Azimuth Check, page 71). Continually ask yourself if the unit goals and priorities, allocation of resources, and award and recognition program reflect who you say you are. Then have the courage to change what needs to be changed.

Summary

Knowing where your unit is going is critical to arriving successfully. The Roman philosopher Seneca put it like this: “You must know for which harbor you are headed if you are to catch the right wind to take you there.” We believe the first step in figuring out “your harbor” is self-study that is focused on understanding what you think is most important. In many ways, your company will reflect who you are; your personal effectiveness will impact how effective your company can be. Take command ready to articulate your vision for the company, but understand that your real goal is to create a shared vision that taps into the passionate commitment of all your soldiers.

Section 4. Initial Unit Assessment

Before you can lead an organization, you need to understand it. Although it is critical that you take command having already developed a personal vision for command, the way that you articulate it and begin building a shared vision will be impacted by the dynamics that already exist in the unit. Perhaps you will find that the unit is already in alignment with your philosophy. On the other hand, once you scratch the surface of the unit, you might find that the values that truly drive behavior in your

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company actually go against your own values. We are not saying that you should accept this, only that you must be aware of it. A well-planned initial unit assessment will help you understand current reality and can serve as a catalyst towards developing a shared vision and tapping into your soldiers' passionate commitment.

Although you might be able to assess the unit prior to taking command, in this section we will focus on assessing the unit once you take command. The techniques we give you will help you tap into the heart of the unit and get at the basic underlying assumptions that drive the organization. Using these techniques will clarify what is frustrating your soldiers and hindering success. This process will also lay the foundation for a good command climate because you are listening and using a team effort to identify the things that are good and bad in the unit. Finally, you will force the leaders to pause and reflect on what they think is most important.

Many of us have seen or used different types of written unit assessments, with different levels of effectiveness. The Army requires, as part of the Equal Opportunity (EO) Program, a unit assessment within the first 90 days of a new commander taking charge and annually thereafter. This standard survey is a series of questions that talks to EO, command climate, and general soldier issues. Although commanders can use this survey to find out information about key command-climate issues (especially if there is a "red flag" issue lurking out there), the process of internal written assessment could be used much more effectively. We will show you how to use the written survey to help transform your unit.

Most commanders meet with their soldiers right after taking command to officially introduce themselves and to talk about their priorities. This event is a "must" that sets the stage for the rest of your time in command.²⁰ Consider what you will say and ensure it is aligned with and communicates your personal vision. To get the most out of the process, the next step is to listen to

²⁰ Work with the outgoing commander and get this on the training schedule. When *you* are the outgoing commander, make sure this event is on the actual training schedule for the incoming commander.

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your soldiers and take note of their concerns. Doing so establishes two-way communication and will begin to lay the foundation for trust simply because you care enough to listen. Moreover, you learn a great deal about the state of affairs in the unit. This process loses effectiveness the longer you wait. Within weeks, the soldiers will perceive you as part of the “problem” or the “them,” and simply will not open up and be as honest with you. Don’t miss this once-in-a-command opportunity.

Right after taking command, we spoke with the lower enlisted soldiers (EMs) and gave them a feel for who we were. We then gave the soldiers a butcher block and pens, and told them they had twenty minutes to write up the issues that were most important to them. We wanted to hear constructive input in the form of sustain and improve from the junior enlisted perspective. We could feel the energy moving in the room once they realized we weren’t joking. We headed into another room where we met with the officers and NCOs of the outfit to tell them about ourselves and to hand out written questionnaires. Thirty minutes later, we returned to the EMs to find them still hard at work. At this point we had them brief us on their product to make sure that their intent was clear. You must seek to understand what they are really trying to say, which may be different than what they write. If there is something that is clearly not constructive, tell them right up front—they will respect you for it. Collect the butcher block and tell them that you will meet again the next month to review the issues and assess progress. This process was great fun and went a long way toward establishing rapport with the young soldiers in our new units. A good follow-up or update brief thirty days later is critical to establishing trust and showing them that the initial input was not just a “check the block” for you.²¹

The questionnaire we gave all the NCOs and officers of the unit really helped us understand the unit and helped us shape what we wanted to focus on right away. We found our leaders to be open, honest, and eager to share their ideas. Keep the questions simple and make sure you explain why you are doing

²¹ A great technique is to use the same butcher block during your update brief to the soldiers.

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this. There are many possible questions that will cause your leaders to think about the purpose of the unit and what needs to be changed to make the company better. See the example survey below to spark your thinking—keeping it to five or fewer questions will be more productive than having an overwhelming laundry list.

Although the survey itself is important, the real key is what you do with the comments. Right away, we collated similar responses and established several themes that appeared to exist in the unit. Next, we shared the results with the ISG and other leaders in the outfit, keeping in mind that the responses might be misleading or just symptoms of problems. What you are really after is discovering the real, underlying causes to the issues; knowing them will allow you to begin effecting significant change right away. What you don't want to do is to fix one problem and create another. Quite often today's solutions are tomorrow's problems.

<u>LEADER SURVEY</u>
Directions: Please answer the following questions. Attach separate sheets of paper if you need more room.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you think the bottom-line purpose of this unit is? Why do we exist? • What do you like about this unit? • What one thing is keeping this company from being even better?

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- What is your biggest source of frustration in the unit right now?
- If the company were like _____, you would be excited. Describe what you would like the company to be like in the future.

Here are some other possible questions:

- What five or six words would you use to describe the character, feel, or spirit of this company?
- What words would you use to describe the kind of team you *want* to be on?
- What one thing would help give you more job satisfaction?
- What would you like to see more of?

In addition to helping us know and assess where our units were at, the surveys helped us look toward the future. Having the written comments put us in a great position to launch discussions about what is and should be important to the unit and what the direction of the outfit should be. Our young leaders were now thinking about what they thought was important to the unit and were discussing how the unit was or was not fulfilling their expectations. This reflection and dialogue is critical as you begin to communicate a vision for the outfit.

Looking back at the questionnaires over a year later, we were amazed at how much came out in the process. Almost every underlying problem in the unit was right there in black and white. Some of the issues were easy to tackle, while others took a lot of teaching, coaching, mentoring, and even personnel changes. The process was an invaluable tool that helped establish a road map for the future.

We end this section by underscoring that it is absolutely critical that you fully include your ISG and executive officer in this process—positive changes will never happen without unity at the top.

Section 5. Unit Goals

Once you have developed a shared vision and clearly understand the current state of affairs in your company, the next step is to develop unit goals that provide the outfit with specific things to work for. It is this step that takes good intentions—purpose, envisioned future, and core values—and translates them into action. When goals are aligned with vision, big things happen.

We developed goals that fell under each element of our command framework: Leader-driven, Disciplined, Fit, and Motivated. The company goals became the basis for our OER support forms. We had our platoon leaders develop platoon goals and had them use their platoon goals as the basis for *their* OER support forms.

We love the term Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAG) that James Collins and Jerry Porras describe in their book *Built to Last*.²² General Patton once said, “If you never accept any challenges, you will never experience the exhilaration of victory.” Moreover, “challenge is the motivating environment for excellence.”²³ The term BHAG is about seeking out challenges and allowing them to be catalysts for inspiring performances. Soldiers consistently accomplish great things when they are challenged to do so. BHAGs are intensely challenging and may even appear insurmountable to *outsiders*—but your soldiers see them as tough but achievable.

Start by seeking out small victories in order to build momentum and a culture of achievement in the outfit. Keep your

²² Collins, James and Jerry Porras, *Built To Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, 1994: p. 91-114.

²³ Teresa Amabile, “How To Kill Creativity,” *Harvard Business Review*, Sep-Oct 1998: p. 53.

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eyes open for opportunities to create momentum and talk up the great things that are happening in the outfit. Once soldiers see what can be accomplished, they will gain great confidence in the organization and will begin to see future challenges in a new light. Once a BHAG has been met, create another one in order to keep the outfit from becoming complacent and satisfied. This kind of thinking creates soldiers who step up to the plate, seek out challenges, think innovatively, and never cower in the face of tough odds. In combat, units will be faced with Big Hairy Audacious Goals—victory will always go to the unit that has accomplished great things during training and is therefore confident when faced with adversity in combat.

One can also describe a BHAG as a “stretch goal”—a goal that requires the organization to change how it operates. If you want to create change, you must enable your subordinates to think *outside of the box*; if the goal can be accomplished by operating in the same old way, your subordinates will not need to create innovative, new, and better solutions. In other words, if you want fundamental change, establish a goal that can be accomplished only if the outfit changes the way it does business. Only a BHAG or stretch goal will create the dynamic, innovative energy that causes great things to happen.

Being invited to do better than we've ever done before compels us to reach deep down inside and bring forth the adventurer within...if leaders wish to get the best from others, they must search for or create opportunities for people to outdo themselves.²⁴

This approach is the difference between seeking to avoid failures on the APFT and seeking to have the best average in the division. Your achievers will not be overly challenged or motivated to simply qualify on their personal weapon, but they might get excited if they are challenged to develop a marksmanship program that will yield 50% experts.

²⁴ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 1995, p. 42.

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Goal setting should be your leadership team's responsibility (together); however, you initially will need to push your leaders out of their comfort zones. Although soldiers will rise to meet challenges, they will not typically create goals that stretch them beyond their current capabilities and require them to think differently. Once your leaders have been energized around a stretch goal once or twice, they will begin to seek out challenges for themselves. Regardless of who creates the goals, the goals must be clearly communicated to the organization and must remain stable and well defined. You must be able to know when you achieve the goal; otherwise, it is no longer a goal.²⁵

One last thought on unit goals: this isn't just about setting objectives and achieving them—it is about creating a climate in your organization that compels soldiers to embrace challenges and to rise to meet them with every available resource.

Don't underestimate the impact that your words have on your soldiers. Examine your speech patterns as you talk with your soldiers. Are you "playing to win" or "playing not to lose"? The difference between these two approaches has tremendous long-term consequences. Don't dwell in your communication on what you *don't* want to happen. Instead, focus your communication on what incredible things you *do* want to happen. When you tell someone not to lock the keys in the car, they immediately have an image of the keys being locked in the car, which can lead them to doing exactly what you did not want them to do. We challenge you to focus your guidance on the great things you expect your soldiers to do rather than on what you do not want them to do.

We close this section with two examples to get you thinking:

- Your unit is going into an operation in built-up terrain (MOUT) where there will be many non-combatants. Instead of demanding that "no civilians be shot," clearly articulate the rules of engagement (ROE) with a focus on accomplishment of the mission. The "playing not to lose" mind-set handicaps soldiers while the other frees

²⁵ Teresa Amabile, "How To Kill Creativity," Harvard Business Review, Sep-Oct 1998.

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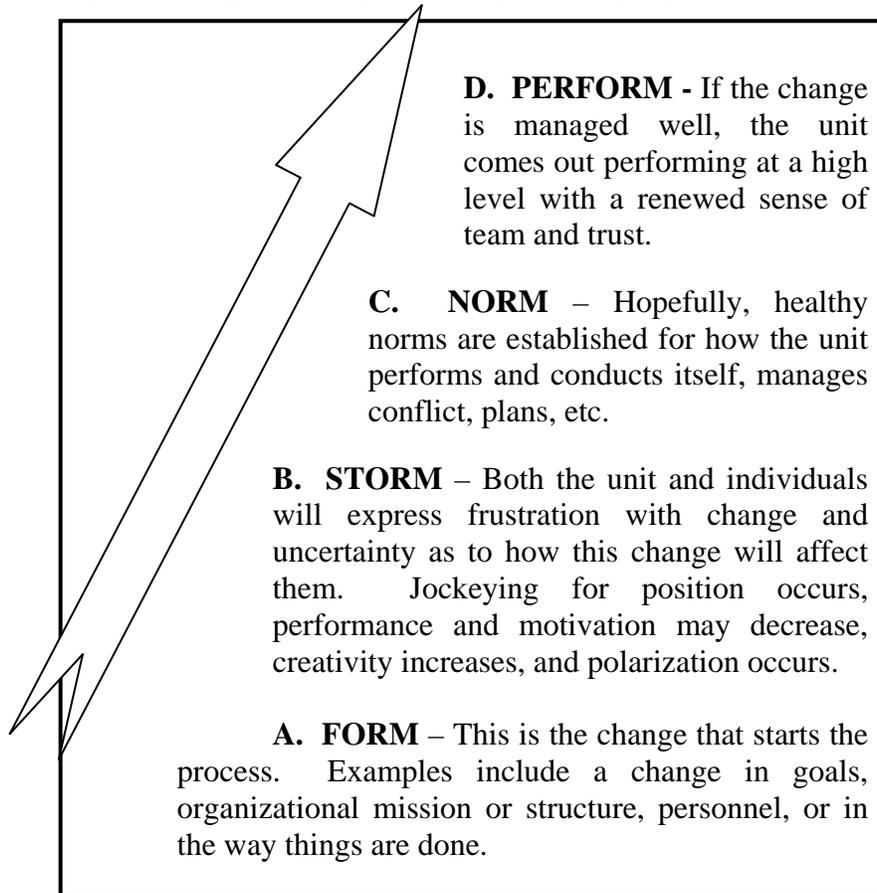
them in trust to handle each unique situation in the most appropriate manner.

- Your unit is stepping off on a five-mile run. Do you stand in front of this incredible group of soldiers and yell out, “No fall-outs!” This statement will automatically conjure up images of “falling out” in the minds of many soldiers, and it certainly won’t motivate your physically fit troopers. Imagine if you stepped up in front of the company and read them a Medal of Honor (CMH) citation and then said, “Our objective this morning is a five-mile run. I need every single one of you on the objective. Victory, follow me!”

Are you fired up? We are!

Section 6. Managing Change and Transition

Change will happen—so don't fight it. Embrace it, and use it as an opportunity to build your team! We know that every organization goes through four stages during any transition:



Your unit will experience this cycle many times throughout your time in command. It will happen when you take command, as your subordinate leaders rotate, and when your unit gets deployed. Finally, change that happens at the battalion and brigade level will impact the company too.

We believe that the way you respond to change will set the tone for your entire company.

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If you understand that the “storm” phase accompanied by stress and uncertainty usually precedes the “norm” and “perform” stage, you will be much more likely to communicate confidence and a positive outlook that your subordinates will respond to. Kouzes and Posner put it this way: “Stress always accompanies the pursuit of excellence.”²⁶ Being aware of this can radically alter the way you and your subordinate leaders manage change.

Clearly, the biggest change and transition that you will initially face is when you take command of your unit. Not only is this a big change for the unit, but also for you personally. We have already discussed some leadership tasks that will help you through this transition process, to include: having a clear vision; establishing and staying focused on the unit’s core values; and setting and achieving short-term goals. In the final chapter of this book we will discuss how communication, trust, and team building are also crucial to leading organizations through change. In this next section, we will focus on a technique for planning your transition into command.

90-Day Agenda

Your move into command is a major change for the unit. You must have a plan to manage it. One great technique is to come into command with a three-month plan that lays out all the “big rocks” that you want to get established up front.²⁷ The first three months will become the bedrock for your future success, but you must have a plan. Initially, just come up with a generic 90-day plan, with one focus area per week. These are the areas that you want to check, establish SOPs for, and teach, coach, and mentor your leaders about.

As you draw closer to your assumption of command (preferably eight weeks out), you can begin taking your generic plan and laying it on the actual calendar. Once you complete

²⁶ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 1995: p. 50.

²⁷ Steve Delvaux played a big role in developing this “90-Day Agenda” concept. While we were at the Infantry Officer Advanced Course (Now Captains Career Course), he spent hours with us brainstorming about how to build a winning team.

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your initial unit assessment, you can further tailor your 90-day plan based on the specific needs and issues that you identify. For example, if you discover that your subordinate leaders are extremely frustrated with PT, you might move this up in your plan and address it right away. If you have a Division Maintenance Assessment coming up, you might adjust your plan so that you focus on maintenance right away.

Below is an example three-month plan. Right away the commander wanted to conduct an in-depth unit assessment using surveys and sensing sessions. In addition, counseling was one of his “big rocks,” so he targeted this during the first month. As a part of that focus on counseling he ensured that there was a quality counseling SOP, leaders understood it, and they were actually following it. The company would deploy to the JRTC three months after he took command; therefore, several of the items on the 90-day agenda related to this. One example of a JRTC-related item was “knowing the enemy at JRTC.” The commander brought in “experts” to teach classes on the enemy and held informal discussions and wargaming sessions with his leadership.

Month 1	Month 2	Month 3
Unit Assessment	PT SOP	JRTC-focused PT
Counseling Program	Company Tactical SOP	Know the Enemy (JRTC)
Training Mgt	Maintenance SOP	Deployment (POM, N-hr, etc.)
METL	OPD/NCOPD & Ldr Dev.	FRG & BOSS Newsletter

The chain of command knew what items were being addressed each week because the commander published his agenda up front. The end result was that SOPs were reviewed or developed from scratch, the company was very focused, and the commander’s “big rocks” were implemented. The typical alternative is to come into command with no real plan and simply

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try to execute the previous commander's training schedule while you react to the overwhelming "urgent" things that dominate your days.

A crucial moment as you come into command is the meeting with your 1SG and XO in which you talk about roles and responsibilities. Spend a lot of time with them to ensure that all three of you are heading in the same direction and that you aren't duplicating work. In general, you should be focused on commanding and training the company, while the 1SG runs it, and the XO resources and maintains it. You must break down what that structure looks like with them and ensure that there is someone designated to be responsible for each critical system.

Leaving Command Side-Bar

Remember that the legacy of a leader is not where he is heading, but rather what he has left behind! Part of what you leave behind is the ability for the unit to function in your absence. For this to happen, systems, discipline, and initiative must be instilled—which requires a paradigm shift from managing your unit to leading and developing it, no matter what the cost. An additional mark of effective leaders is their ability to provide their units with a smooth transition to the next commander. As you prepare to leave command, take the initiative to get the next commander involved early on at meetings and by jointly developing a 90-day agenda. If you conduct a leader off-site azimuth check (See Leader Azimuth Check, page 71), take the incoming commander and let her run the planning portion for the training that she will be conducting with your unit. The incoming commander can listen in on all of the assessments and then give the unit initial guidance on the upcoming training—instead of having to go through that transition after taking command. It is all about what is best for your unit! Have new commanders review the vision to see if they feel comfortable with it, and help them get on board with where the unit is headed and what you are about as a team. You want the new commander to be successful!

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down when you provide feedback to the outfit on the poll.”²⁸ Searching out feedback that is tied to your unit vision and goals will take you to the “next level.” As we mentioned earlier, you must have a clear picture of current reality if you expect to be aware of the changes you need to make to take you where you want to go.

An effective technique is to develop a quarterly survey that asks soldiers how well the unit is doing in those areas that the leadership agreed was important. This review is different than arbitrary surveys or sensing sessions because it solicits feedback on specific items. Moreover, it helps create a culture of accountability whereby the important things are clearly important. Avoiding problems never leads to success; surveys help the leadership come face to face with the issues that prevent the unit from being as good as it can be. Real learning happens when a person sees the gap that exists between reality and what they think is happening. Begin with leaders committed to the unit vision and goals, and then use polling as one method to help them see the “gap.”

Let us say that one of your unit’s “big rocks” is having a high-quality counseling program. Think of the impact you would have on the unit if you simply asked E4s and below if they are being given good feedback every month on what is expected of them and how they are performing. We are not talking about pointing fingers, but rather about creating another system to hold you and your leaders accountable for your goals—**the focus is how we can better live out the values that we have established.** Soldiers tell it like it is. They will give you great insight into things that you and even their immediate leaders might never have known. They will also feel good knowing that you care about what they think and that their leaders will be held accountable and will be required to perform. Emphasize with the leaders that these are the soldiers’ perceptions and not necessarily facts. This approach will help tone down leader defensiveness, and will help leaders accept the process. Polling does not take the place of leaders being where the rubber meets the road and

²⁸ Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper, *Hope Is Not A Method*, 1996.

observing what is happening; it is simply one more system that helps your unit achieve its goals.

For this technique to be effective, there must be a high level of trust between you and your subordinate leaders. MG William Boice once said, “When you are unsure of yourself, everything is threatening. When you are sure of yourself and know what you are doing, nothing is threatening.” If you feel a lot of negative reaction from leaders on an issue, their frustration may be a sign that they are being developed. The goals of the unit are not optional, and the leaders are feeling the effects of being held accountable—either inspiration or frustration depending on their individual attitude and maturity. The next challenge for the leaders is to go through the same process with their subordinates. This is leader development!

Section 8. Leader Development

Your unit will rise only to the level of your leaders!

Dana Meade, a retired colonel and Vietnam veteran who has gone on to excel in the business world, wrote: “Leadership may be difficult to define, but we know that we cannot succeed without it, and that we will certainly recognize it by the exceptional results it produces.”²⁹ Your number one priority as company commander must be developing the leaders who will produce exceptional results. Remember the wheel metaphor? Leadership is the hub that powers everything and allows forward movement in all other areas.

Before we move on and talk about some leader development *how-to's*, we must underscore the importance of your own character and of the way you treat your soldiers. You will never be able to inspire a shared vision or a commitment to leader development unless your subordinates trust you. Likewise, your subordinate leaders will find it difficult to develop *their* subordinates if they themselves are not trustworthy. This rule has been called the “First Law of Leadership: If we don’t believe the

²⁹ Dana Meade in *Leading at Mach 2* by Steve Sullivan, 1995: p. 195

messenger, we won't believe the message."³⁰ You can validate this "law" for yourself by thinking about your own experience—how you perceived the character of your leaders determined how willing you were to learn from them. Moreover, your subordinates will rise to your expectations of them. "Treat a man as he is and he will remain what he is. Treat a man as he can and should be, and he will become as he can and should be."³¹ Your character and how you treat your soldiers will, in large part, define your ability to develop them.

A Concept for Leader Development

We have written this section as if you, the reader, are a company commander. Read it from that perspective, but also understand that this stuff applies to all levels of leadership. Here you will find a practical concept for leader development that can be applied immediately and will result in your leaders being better off for your having been a part of their lives.

Leader development may be considered the expansion of soldiers' individual capacities to lead.³² Research has shown that leadership capacities are best developed through trial and error (actual experience)—but the research also points to several mechanisms and catalysts that, when present, create the conditions for the most development to happen.³³

³⁰ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 1995: p. 26.

³¹ Goethe, as quoted by Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 1989: p. 62.

³² The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) defines leadership development as "the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes...leadership development is the development of capacities within the individual." McCauley, Cynthia D., Russ S. Moxley, and Ellen Van Velsor, ed. *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*, 1998: p. 4.

³³ See James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 1995; Morgan McCall, *High Flyers*, 1998; and McCauley, Cynthia D., Russ S. Moxley, and Ellen Van Velsor, ed. *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*, 1998.

Leader Development is Driven by Experience

We agree with this research and believe that the best way to develop as a leader is to actually lead. Leaders learn by leading, and they learn most when they are placed in a variety of challenging leadership experiences.

Military Experience Side-Bar

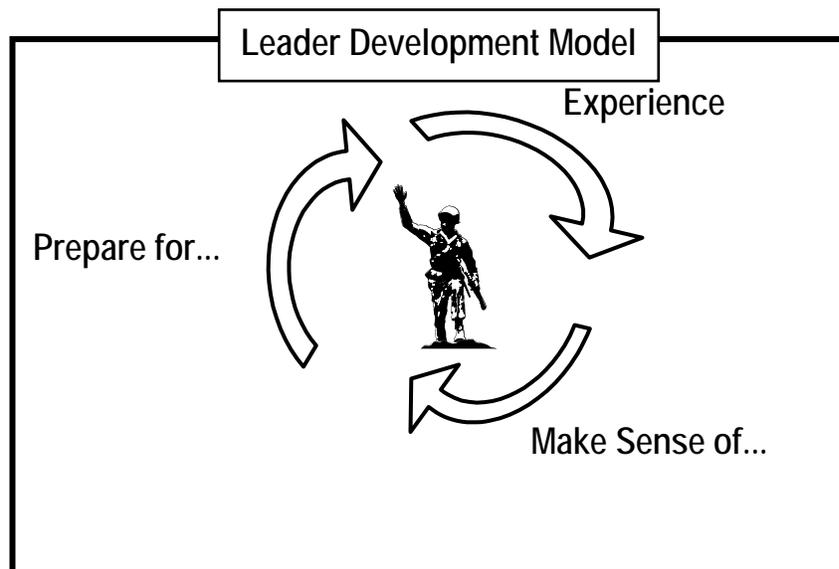
If you agree that developmental experiences are central to developing leaders, then you can see what an incredible opportunity it is to be a young person in the military. It is hard to think of another type of organization where a 22-year old person would get to lead in decentralized, challenging, multi-cultural, and sometimes extremely difficult circumstances. We are thinking of our own experiences like being a platoon leader and company commander during JRTC rotations, deployments to Saudi Arabia and Somalia, and the everyday personnel challenges that every officer faces. The fact that officers change jobs after one to two years reinforces the process of continued development. Add in schools like the Captains' Career Course and Command and General Staff College, and you have a progressive, experience-based model that other organizations can only dream of. Why do you think the business world so ardently seeks out young leaders with military experience?

Clearly the Army provides you some great leader-developing opportunities. However, we want you to see that your leaders could develop their capacity to be effective leaders much, much more if you have a framework for understanding development and then implement specific plans to help them leverage learning from their experiences.

The simplest way we can think of to conceptualize how to leverage learning from experience is in the framework of

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preparing for the experience and **making sense of** the experience (See leader-development model below). As you learn how to better prepare your leaders for experiences and then help them process and make sense of their experiences, you will see significant development in your leaders. Moreover, as your subordinates develop, you will witness the exceptional results that effective leaders produce (i.e., your company will excel).



Preparing for the experience is critical. Think about the paradox that the more you know, the more you can learn. If leaders have thought through the upcoming experience, understand how it ties into the purpose of the unit and their own personal development, and know the doctrine that drives it, they will be in a position to learn a great deal. Contrast that scenario with leaders who go into the experience unprepared and try to learn simply by doing. Not only will these unprepared leaders learn less, but *their units* will also suffer because of it.

Tied into this is the individual leader's ability and motivation to learn. Simply said, a person must be open and motivated to learn from an experience, or else little development will occur.

Make Sense Of the Experience

The second element that leverages learning from experience is how we make sense of and process experiences. “Unexamined experiences don’t produce the rich insights that come with reflection and analysis.”³⁴ The Army AAR process is a great example of taking time to make sense of experience. Honest feedback and rigorous assessment are catalysts that bring out development.

“Leadership is, after all, a set of skills. And any skill can be strengthened, honed, and enhanced if we have the proper motivation and desire, along with practice and feedback, role models and coaching.”³⁵ As a company commander, you will seek to strengthen, hone, and enhance the skills of your subordinates. Following their experiences, you can help them identify the “gaps” that exist in their set of skills and capabilities.³⁶ Seek to identify the gaps and then focus on how those gaps can be narrowed. This type of assessment is focused on development and is the beginning of preparing for the next experience. (See how this is a reinforcing process?)

It is important to note that there is often a delay between the experience and the “development.” You shouldn’t always expect instant growth in your subordinates; if you do, you will probably be frustrated. Like anything worthwhile, individual development takes time and a lot of work. Remember that, like the farmer, the leader-developer plants in the spring but may not harvest until the fall. As an example, your efforts with your lieutenants may not be fully “harvested” until they themselves are taking command.

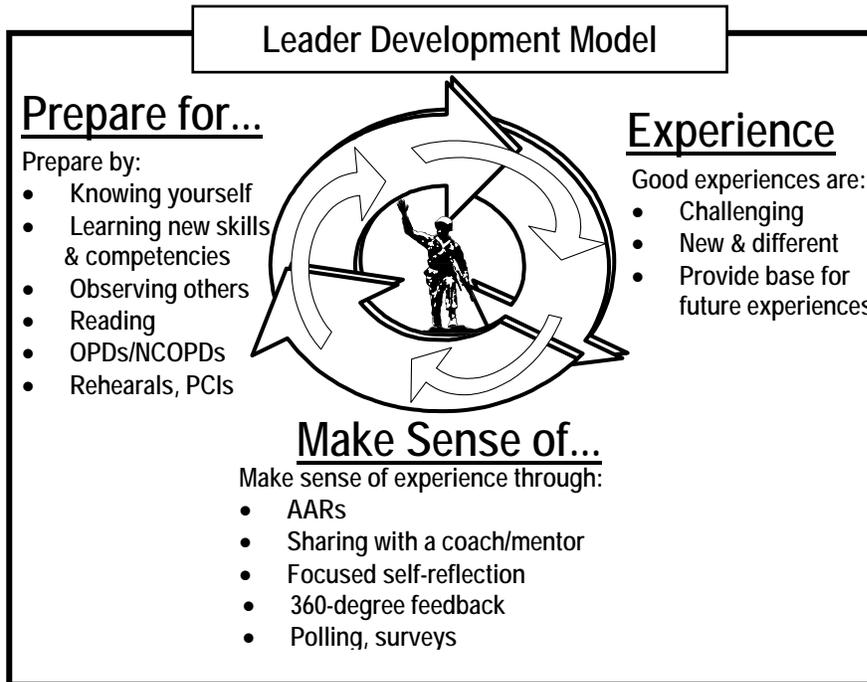
The diagram below summarizes what we have talked about. We use the thick arrows to show how much more powerful the

³⁴ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 1995: p. 329.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 322.

³⁶ You can look for gaps in terms of the Army “Be, Know, Do” framework: **Be**: Who you are (character, values, attributes); **Know**: What you know (skills, knowledge, competencies); **Do**: What you actually do (actions and behaviors). These correspond directly to the Junior Officer Developmental Support Form (JODSF), which makes that an ideal form to use when developing a plan to close the “gaps.”

leader-development process will be when it is planned and occurs in the right environment.



The wonderful thing about leader development is that it is a continuous, reinforcing process that happens over time. The more your leaders develop, the better able they are to prepare for and make sense of their experiences, thus leveraging the most development from them. As the leader develops, he or she is better able to prepare for the next experience, and has a richer context with which to process new experiences.

Making Sense Side-Bar

There are some experiences that your subordinates are bound to misinterpret unless you step in and help them make sense of them—do not assume that you and your subordinates are processing an experience in the same way. When something bad or confusing happens (e.g., a training accident occurs, your unit does not accomplish the mission, or things just don't go the way you planned them), it is critical that you

take the requisite time to talk with your leaders. We are excellent at AAR-ing collective training events, but we rarely take time out to “make sense of” and process other events that might be misinterpreted by young leaders. Don’t leave this to chance—talk, communicate, coach, and mentor!

The leader-development process works best if it occurs within a learning environment. Imagine a unit where innovation and risk-taking are the norm, failure is not feared, and the focus is on growing and getting better instead of evaluating and weeding out. Challenging experiences will inevitably lead to some mistakes or failure. **How you deal with mistakes will define the learning environment in your unit.** The leader who sees failure as an opportunity to help junior leaders grow and develop will foster an environment that encourages stepping out of the “box” and trying innovative and new solutions. If you recognize that true *life-change* comes from times of either great joy or great pain, you can begin to see failure as an opportunity to develop leaders.

Think about your own training experiences to see this process in action. For example, let’s say you were a battalion support platoon leader during a Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation. This was an extremely challenging experience and probably would have developed you no matter what. However, in retrospect, you can see how your preparation and ability to learn, combined with feedback and assessment, significantly impacted your development. A positive and honest AAR process, self-reflection, and a battalion focused on growing rather than just evaluating helped you get the most out of the experience.

In summary, you can help develop your subordinates by making sure they get challenging, developmental experiences. Then, do everything you can to leverage learning by helping them prepare for and make sense of and process those experiences by providing and encouraging rigorous assessment and feedback.

Leader development will never *just happen*. Remember the “big rocks?” If it is important, then it needs to be scheduled on

the calendar and deliberately planned. It is not enough to simply talk about it. And the company commander, more than anyone else, can impact whether or not there are specific plans for leader development in the unit for all leaders from the top to the bottom of her organization. We will now describe some practical ways that you can put talk into action.

Leader Development Put Into Action

Actions speak louder than words, so quickly move from talking about the importance of leader development to actually doing it.

Almost everything you do develops your leaders. From daily decisions you make, to on-the-spot corrections, to planning and executing training, to UCMJ actions—you are modeling leadership, and your leaders *will be* developed. However, in order to have the most powerful impact, you need to go beyond setting the example and role-modeling—you need to go into command having a clear leader-development philosophy, to include a specific plan of action. In this section, you will find some ideas to spark your thinking and inspire you to put theory into practice.

If, in fact, leader development is synonymous with personal development, one of the most significant things you can do is to require your junior leaders to study themselves (See *Know Yourself First*, page 9). Have them reflect on their own values and what is important to them. Studies show that having clarity about one's personal values leads to commitment much more so than does having clarity about the organization's values. When you help your subordinate leaders understand themselves—who they are and their own strengths and weaknesses—you unleash great energy in them. Moreover, self-awareness is a catalyst to self-improvement, which is what leader development is all about. When you and your subordinates become aware of the areas they need to improve—their “gaps”—you can develop a plan and create experiences to help them improve and close those “gaps.” Likewise, as you become aware of their strengths, you can understand how to maximize their contributions to the team.

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The absolute best way that you can develop your leaders on a regular basis is simply to use the chain of command when a problem arises. It sounds simple, but this principle is violated regularly—and no one thing will erode trust and leader accountability faster. Whenever there is an issue that involves a soldier, let the chain of command work. If you or your 1SG must address the soldier immediately, ensure that the squad leader is present or at least knows what is going on. Officers' tendency to be problem-solvers, combined with lack of time, makes it hard for them to step back and mentor others toward solving their soldiers' problems. If you and your 1SG make the commitment not to circumvent the chain of command, you will not only develop your leaders, but you will also keep responsibility where it belongs and prevent much unneeded frustration on the part of your leaders.

Another commonsense but often-missed way to develop your leaders is to block in time on the training schedule for leaders to do recurring but critical things to standard. Allocating and protecting adequate time for things like monthly counseling, pre-combat inspections, pre-marksmanship instruction (PMI), preventive maintenance checks (PMCS), and inventories will give your leaders critical experiences that are often done haphazardly due to high OPTEMPO and competing "urgent" demands. You can imagine the detrimental long-term effects when you consistently short-change your leaders in these areas.

A new lieutenant certification program is one method that will make a tremendous difference in the development of your platoon leaders. Not only will it focus new lieutenants; it will also serve to hold you accountable in developing them. This goes back to the importance of having a clear plan for leader development before you take command. Here is an example that you can modify and use for your own unit.

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Example New Lieutenant Certification Program	
Task/Event	Date Completed
Set up and mark all equipment (TA-50 etc.) by SOP	
Qualify with M4	
Meet individual deployment requirements (SRF, POM etc.)	
Complete diagnostic APFT	
Complete LFX certification workbook	
Attend Range Safety Officer (RSO) and Range OIC class	
Complete OER Support Form/JODSF (67-9-1a)	
Brief Cdr on PLT Training and Personnel Status	
Conduct PSG/SL initial counseling	
Pass Company TACSOP written examination	
Pass call-for-fire test by FSNCO	
Pass radio exam to include constructing field expedient antennas	
Assemble/disassemble all platoon weapons w/function check	
Conduct PMCS on all platoon equipment	
Read the book <i>Small Unit Leadership</i> , and write paper	
Pass unit regimental history test	
Receive briefing from S4 on all supply procedures	
Brief XO on status of your additional duties	
Review PLT reception/integration SOP	

Moreover, make monthly officer and NCO professional development (OPD/NCOPD) a priority. This priority is the cornerstone of leader education in a company. Each monthly professional development session should be planned as well as any training event is, tied into the unit's purpose and goals, and part of an overall program. Ill-planned OPD/NCOPDs that don't fit into where you are going as a unit are really just a waste of time.

Tie to OPDs a professional reading program that requires reading and sharing of knowledge. One technique is to write a

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short summary of lessons learned and tips from the books you read, and then make copies to share with your squad leaders and above. Assign different books or articles to different leaders. You can have an amazing impact on your young leaders simply by sharing the notes and ideas you get from reading relevant books and articles. If you don't take notes, you can still pass the book around or make copies of pages/chapters that you want your leaders to read. Subscribe to leadership journals and make sure that Army branch-specific magazines are being read every month.³⁷ If you find a book that inspires you and talks about what you think is important, having your leaders read it will help immensely in getting your team thinking on the same sheet of music. There is a synergistic effect that happens when your subordinates read a book that reinforces a concept you are trying to teach them.³⁸ Follow that up with experiences that reinforce this new thinking, and your leaders will develop dramatically.

Another excellent way to develop your leaders, and your unit overall, is to require your leaders to get out to observe training in other units. Have your platoon leaders attend a different company's training meeting. Send one squad leader from each platoon out to watch innovative marksmanship training being conducted by another unit in the division. When your leaders see outside of their little world, they will be able to look anew at your company. This experience will generate new and better ways of doing business and will give your leaders great perspective on what your own unit is doing.³⁹

³⁷ The Internet is a great way to get quality articles at no cost. *Leader to Leader* is an outstanding Leadership Journal that makes many articles available on their homepage. Have an LT run off one article a month for all your leaders to read. Not only will they learn a lot, but you will create important dialogue amongst your leaders. Check the "Cmd Reading" section of CompanyCommand.com for a list of journals and books that are available online.

³⁸ One of Tony's bosses in the 82nd, Tom Hiebert, had him read three books: Covey's *Principle Centered Leadership*, Moore's *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young*, and Rommell's *Attacks*. The impact was phenomenal.

³⁹ Many will argue that there isn't enough time to do this. Change the way you look at things and you will be surprised how much time is out there. Support cycle is one great opportunity to *free up* some leaders to do this.

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Furthermore, requiring your leaders to plan future training is one of the best ways to develop them. If you are writing all of your unit's training plans, you are depriving your lieutenants of an opportunity to learn. If you are looking out far enough (See Leader Azimuth Check, page 71), you can assign all upcoming training events to a project officer and task him to provide the team a draft MOI for that event at the T-8 training meeting. You review it and give guidance by the T-7 training meeting so that it can be finalized and ready for resourcing by T-6.

Are you spending a lot of time doing things that aren't a part of your "big three"? If you are able to delegate the task, then delegate it. Yes, this often takes time because you have to train the individual on how to do it, but now you are developing your leaders! On top of that, you will now have time available to talk with soldiers, visit training, and plan future training. There are certain things that only a commander can do—no one else in the unit can perform these tasks. Focus on those things that only you can do and allow your leaders to do the other tasks.

Finally, any method you use to enhance feedback in your outfit will vastly improve leader development. Quality counseling will be the biggest catalyst. One-on-one counseling done on a regular basis that focuses on helping the leader make sense of past experiences and prepare for upcoming experiences will be the greatest ongoing activity that supports leader development. Use counseling as an opportunity to encourage and support innovation and risk taking and to challenge your leaders to seek out developmental experiences.

To get the most out of your developmental counseling, we recommend you spend some time prior to your counseling sessions thinking about leader development through the framework that we have described in this section of the book. We have applied that framework to the checklist you see below, in an effort to make it more practical. We believe that the impact you have on your subordinates will be directly related to how much time you spend coaching and mentoring them through this process.

First, you will want to assess the learning environment in your unit:

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The Learning Environment:

- Is risk taking and innovation encouraged?
- Are leaders afraid to fail, or do they view failure as a potential opportunity to grow and develop?
- Is assessment and feedback focused on growth and development or on evaluating and identifying winners and weeding out losers?

Next, use this checklist as a developmental guide for each of your subordinate leaders:

Lieutenant Checklist:

- Is he motivated to learn and grow?
- **Experience:**
 - What developmental experience has he had already?
 - What is the next critical upcoming experience?
 - What experiences would best develop him?
- **Prepare for the experience**
 - What is he good at? (Strengths and Natural Aptitudes)
 - What does he need to work on? (“Gaps”/Weaknesses)
 - How can he narrow the gaps that we know exist?
 - What is he reading right now that could impact preparation for upcoming experiences and narrow the gaps?
 - What formal training/education would help him prepare for the next key experience?
- **Make sense of and process the experience**
 - What did he learn from the experience?
 - What did not make sense, was confusing, or did not fit previous assumptions?
 - What are the “gaps” in effectiveness? ...as identified through:

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- Self Assessment
- Others' Assessment and Feedback
 - 360-Degree Feedback
 - Surveys/Polling
 - Sensing Sessions
 - Feedback from you (the company commander)

After working through this checklist, you and your subordinate can then jointly develop a personal leader-development action plan. Effective leader-development action plans are intentional (planned and focused, not haphazard), purposeful (tied into the organizational vision), and personal. Fortunately, the Army has a fantastic “action plan” form ready for you to use; it is called the Junior Officer Developmental Support Form (JODSF).⁴⁰ For example, if one of your lieutenants has a “gap” in the area of public speaking—his lack of confidence in front of a group is preventing him from effectively communicating—then you might ask him what *specifically* he plans to do to close the “gap.” Some effective action plan bullets on the JODSF might look like this:

- Read two books on public speaking NLT 1 October.
- Give the company safety briefing on Friday, 5 October.
- Videotape next platoon operations order briefing (9-10 October platoon LFX)

Encourage your lieutenants to develop their own action plans, but provide coaching and mentoring through the process. Then

⁴⁰ *FM 22-100 Army Leadership* and the developmental counseling web page (<http://www.counseling.army.mil/>) are both awesome resources for counseling that lay out how to counsel effectively and use both the JODSF and the Army developmental counseling form (DA Form 4856-E). Of note, the counseling form has a section called “Plan of Action” and a section for leaders to clarify their responsibilities in implementing the plan of action.

regularly review this process, have the lieutenants update the JODSF at least quarterly, and hold them accountable to their plans. Finally, when you counsel your subordinates, ask them to talk you through *their* subordinates' leader-development action plans.⁴¹ You are modeling the type of counseling you want them to do. In addition, you are requiring them to tell you, in specific terms, how they are developing their own subordinates.

Executive Officer Development

You have a special responsibility to develop your executive officer (XO). Make it a goal to prepare your XO for command by providing her with experiences and then helping her make sense of the experiences. You are the mentor that can have the biggest impact. Her future time in command will be influenced by everything she sees you do. The other reason that developing your XO is critical is that in combat she will inevitably have to take over, whether you are injured, at a Battalion OPORD, or simply conducting decentralized operations. Her effectiveness will be directly related to the experiences that you have given her during training.

During the course of your command, there will be times when your XO will have to take over simply because you are not available. However, you will also want to ensure that she gets opportunities to take over when you *are* around. Let the XO run a training meeting and then work with her afterwards on what could have been done better. The most dramatic impact you can have on her future will be in tactical operations. Allow her to plan and execute several missions during your time in command.⁴² The XO is extremely busy, so if you don't force her to do this she may come up with a list of the "urgent" things that prevent her from doing it. One technique is to follow behind her

⁴¹ For NCOs, the NCOER form and the developmental counseling form are great tools to accomplish this.

⁴² Tony can remember in detail every company operation that Martin Reutebuch, his company commander, let him lead while he was the XO. Not only was Martin mentoring Tony, but he also was inspiring a lasting trust and commitment.

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on an operation and handle all calls to battalion while she runs the company. Or, you might tell the battalion commander what you are doing and let your XO do all the talking. Do what works, given the dynamics in your battalion.

One of your greatest legacies will be how effective your subordinates are as they command their own companies. For your XO, this opportunity could happen within a year or two upon leaving your unit; in combat, it could be much quicker. As you draw up a specific list of goals for your time in command, include the development of your executive officer with specific bullets like, “She will plan and execute at least two company tactical operations.”

Leader Training (Enabling Training)

Leader development is the ongoing process of growth leaders undergo throughout their careers, with an emphasis on process and potential. Leader training, a critical sub-element of leader development, is focused on preparing leaders to conduct specific upcoming collective training events.

If training is the Army’s priority, then leader training has got to be one of your top priorities. Planned, hands-on leader training prior to collective training will make the difference between great and mediocre training. The long-term impact will mean the difference between being a winning team or a losing team.

A great way to conduct leader training is to start with an open-book written test given a week before any collective training event. This test can be developed by one of the platoon leaders or platoon sergeants and should cover all of the doctrine, company SOPs, and TTPs related to the training event. Take a hard look at the collective tasks being trained and then test those and the supporting sub-unit collective, leader, and individual tasks. One technique would be to post the top three scores for everyone to see (consider giving a three-day pass to the squad whose leaders’ combined scores are the highest in the company). Ensure the low-scoring leaders are re-tested, counseled, and

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developed so that they raise their knowledge level prior to the training event.

Then, the Friday before the training event, release your soldiers early and have the team leaders and above conduct hands-on training focused on the tasks to be trained the following week. This can be done using Omega-type training where leaders operate one level down as a unit performing the tasks. Or, based upon your situation, conduct instruction with each platoon giving classes on certain aspects of the training to be conducted using a round-robin approach. During this time, ensure you also train and re-validate your company SOPs that apply to the upcoming event. Implied here is that you iron out the company SOPs prior to the leader training.

For example, before our units conducted close-quarters battle training at the MOUT site, we gave a written test focused on doctrine, room clearing techniques, reflexive firing, and company SOPs. We then ran tape drills (white engineer tape replicating room layouts) with team leaders and above the Friday before training and showed video from the last MOUT LFX. Finally, the following week we started the training at team and squad level.⁴³

Because of the vast difference in experience and knowledge that your leaders will have, it is crucial that you validate them through this process before every training event. We call this process learning the science. The first and crucial step must be that junior leaders understand the doctrine (grounded in the doctrinal basics and their weapons systems) and company SOPs—the science—and are thoroughly prepared for training. The practice of the art comes later as leaders know the science and apply it to their experiences. Too many leaders want to practice the art before understanding the science and they end up winging it, *hoping* things will turn out. The art will grow out of the science as they apply it.

Quality leader training takes time and is hard work. Your leaders must be willing to sacrifice and pay the price up front in

⁴³ Imagine: The EMs have Friday off (they are motivated), the leaders are actually prepared for training (they are empowered), and everyone is excited during the actual training because it is quality training.

order to attain excellence. We call this a spirit of sacrifice—without it, you will quickly slip back into mediocre training. This spirit must start with you. Allocate time on the training calendar and hold your leaders accountable to properly preparing for training. A commitment to quality leader training will result in collective training that is *Super Bowl*, instead of *High School*, quality. Such a commitment will affect every aspect of your organization.

Chapter Summary

This entire first chapter on leadership is interwoven with leader development. Simply stated, you will never have exceptional leadership without a focus on leader development. Character and values and a commitment to those things that really matter are what drive success here. All of these things take time. However, it is time well spent and time that will make success in all the other areas talked about in this book possible.

As we close out this section, we want to end with a review of several key points that are the foundation for leader development. First, have a specific plan. Leader development is personal development. Personal development doesn't just happen; you need a specific development plan for the unit in general and for each of your subordinate leaders in particular. Remember the Farming Law—*You Reap What You Sow*. The seeds you sow as a leader in your soldiers' lives, whether for gain or loss, will produce fruit that the Army will reap for years to come. It is a process that takes great patience and wisdom. Too many leaders want to plant and harvest all in the same season.

Second, *more is caught than taught*. Your soldiers will care far more about what you say with your actions than with your words, so be very sure your actions match your words. It is hard for soldiers to believe the message if they do not believe the messenger. When you think you have the least influence might be when you have the most. The moment you think no one is watching and you take an action (right or wrong) is usually the moment when you are actually having the biggest impact. A soldier will observe you, and the effects will resound throughout

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your organization as no speech could ever do. What you *do* speaks so loudly that your soldiers won't hear what you *say*!

Leader development is driven by experience. In fact, challenging experiences and the ability to learn from them are the centerpieces of development. Preparing for experiences and making sense of them are the two critical ways we leverage the most learning. When this happens in the right environment, incredible leader development will occur.

In conclusion, leaders are responsible for developing their subordinates. However, leaders are also responsible for their own development. **Remember to continue to prepare for and make sense of your own experiences as you prepare for and command your outfit.**

Your Exceptionally Led Company

- Everything in your company hinges on your leadership.
- Spend focused time learning from experienced company commanders.
- Develop your personal vision for command—purpose, envisioned future, core values—and then take your leaders through this same process in order to create a compelling, shared vision.
- Develop big hairy audacious goals (BHAGs) that will ignite the fire of passionate purpose in your company.
- Prior to taking the guidon, develop a 90-day agenda.
- Conduct an initial assessment of your unit with a written survey.
- Figure out what the “big rocks” are and then put them on the calendar. Be aware of but don’t worry about the “sand.” You reap what you sow!
- Develop a leader development plan of action for the company as a whole and for each of your individual subordinate leaders.
- Experience is the central aspect of development; leverage learning for your leaders by helping them prepare for and make sense of their experiences.
- Conduct quality leader training down to team leader level prior to every collective training event.

Example Memorandum for Company Leaders (Used in a light infantry rifle company)

SUBJECT: A Winning Team of Disciplined, Fit, and Motivated Warriors

1. Soldiers want to be on the winning team. After all, losing in combat leads to death. Our mission as the leaders of this company is to build a winning team. Leadership is the force behind all the things that make winning possible. If you imagine a winning team as a wheel, leadership based on values and principles is the hub that powers the wheel, while the spokes are discipline, fitness, and motivation. In this memorandum, I will give you some thoughts on leadership (the hub that drives the wheel), and my expectations for you to be disciplined, fit, and motivated.

2. First, be a **LEADER** of character. A leader knows where he wants the organization to go and he successfully communicates this vision to the organization. I want you to be an integral part of developing and communicating our vision.

a. You will never be able to inspire a shared vision or communicate the core purpose/mission unless your subordinates believe in you. This has been referred to as the “First Law of Leadership: If we don’t believe in the messenger, we won’t believe the message” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995: 26). I believe that long-term success for Army leaders depends on who you are, and character is what drives this. Part of character is doing what you say and being congruent in word and deed (Integrity). Words whisper and example thunders, or as an old CSM once said, “The longer I live, the less I pay attention to what people say and the more I pay attention to what people do.”

b. Trust is the essential ingredient in any relationship, especially among soldiers. As I mentioned, doing what you say is critical. So also “trust is not about words; its genesis is the result of deeds” (Sullivan, 1996: 142). Trustworthiness is the foundation of trust; if you want to be trusted, you must be trustworthy. I look at trust as a bucket that is filled one eyedropper at a time. Another way to imagine trust is

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a bank account that is best built by regular deposits (Covey, 1994). Ask yourself whether or not your behavior is making a deposit or a withdrawal in your subordinates' trust bank account. You can see that "who you are" will drive whether or not people will trust you over time. If your character is weak, no one will trust you; if no one trusts you, you are not a leader.

c. Leadership is the hub that powers the wheel or the force that drives the success of our company. I want you to make this the center of your framework for developing a winning team. Do so by *Setting the Example*: You show your soldiers every day what right looks like. Provide your platoon purpose, direction, and motivation. Give them feedback so they know, down to the soldier, that their hard work is accomplishing something and that they are going somewhere. Show them where they need to go and tell them when they get there.

3. The one soldier quality that soldiers care the most about in combat (besides courage) is competence. **DISCIPLINED** leaders seek to be more and more competent, mentally sharp, and technically and tactically proficient. You must be completely committed to learning the tools of your profession.

a. Training. Concentrate on our METL and the critical tasks that support it. You need to understand our training management doctrine and how to plan and execute excellent training. Always begin with leader enabling training, include individual skill training, and then focus on our standard battle drills and critical collective tasks. Get your platoon ready to execute their wartime mission under all conditions.

b. Maintaining. We can neither train nor execute our combat mission if we don't have operational equipment. I expect you to maintain your equipment. Know and report the correct status of your equipment and track deficiencies through the Army Maintenance System until they are fixed. Incorporate maintenance training into every maintenance period and hold your subordinate leaders accountable. Maintain 100% property accountability and ensure all property is properly hand receipted to the appropriate level.

c. Safety. Understand and incorporate risk management/force protection into all training and operations. Always identify hazards and do everything you can to reduce risks. This is a way of thinking that boils down to doing the right thing and keeping our soldiers safe.

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Reinforce safety during soldiers' off time, especially with regards to drinking and driving.

4. Be **PHYSICALLY FIT** and develop physically fit soldiers. Physical training is the most important training conducted on a daily basis; consider physical training as important as any METL-based training on the schedule. Our goal is to develop and maintain a challenging, fun, and progressive PT program that produces physically fit soldiers that can accomplish our mission. This area includes our day-to-day PT program, foot marches, health and welfare, sick call, and educating our soldiers on health and fitness issues. Finally, enjoy PT and help make it fun and challenging for all your soldiers.

5. Be a part of building a **MOTIVATED** outfit. Our goal is to develop a great command climate that is based on trust, respect, and true compassion for every soldier and family in the company. In short, let's develop a great unit that we are all proud of and enjoy being a part of.

a. In addition to always doing what you say you will do, leaders must demonstrate compassion and genuine respect for their subordinates in order to gain trust. Truly treating others the way you would want to be treated is the rule that should guide every leader's behavior.

b. Do everything you possibly can to take care of the soldiers entrusted to you and to make them feel like they are a significant part of our important mission. When it comes to things like counseling soldiers, writing their NCOERs, ensuring their pay problems get fixed, and awarding their PCS awards prior to their departure from the unit, always give 100%. Seek out opportunities to do and say things that will convince each individual that he is an essential part of a whole team—one that others depend upon to get their part done.

c. Another critical part of building a motivated and effective team is open communication. Ensure that every soldier knows what is on the training schedule and what is expected of him. No one should feel like they are "in the dark." Clearly and consistently explain your expectations and tell your soldiers how and why the unit's priorities are changing. In addition, know what is going on in your part of the unit. Provide feedback, but also seek it out. Excellent communication—up, down, and sideways—is fundamental to a motivated and effective unit.

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d. Finally, do not forget that in combat, mission accomplishment drives morale far more than the other way around, and the best way to take care of soldiers is to fully prepare them for tomorrow's battle. Let us then develop a warrior attitude with the will to win that begins with the will to *get ready* that is the hallmark of all great teams.

6. My door is open and I always have time for the soldiers of this company. One of my main goals is to help you grow as a leader, and I will spend time counseling, teaching, and mentoring you with the goal of making you and this company the best we can possibly be. Set the example in all things and remember that everything you do has an impact on the unit—when in doubt, **DO THE RIGHT THING!**