

# The Art of Leadership

LTC RICHARD P. TAYLOR

In any organization, leaders must demonstrate positive, effective, and meaningful leadership. This can only be done by creating an environment of trust built on genuine concern for your people and their families, all while being authentic and humble. In our ambiguous environment, there is one constant — leaders at all levels are needed to maintain the positive momentum of the organization. A truly great organization, no matter the size or complexity, requires leaders who focus on their subordinates, developing them to one day fill their role as the organization's leader.

Doris Kearns Goodwin said that senior leaders must develop leaders who “have situated resilience, the ability to sustain ambition in the face of frustration, at the heart of potential leadership growth. More important than what happened to them was how they responded to these reversals, how they managed in various ways to put themselves back together, how these watershed experiences at first impeded, then deepened, and finally and decisively molded their leadership.”<sup>1</sup> If organizations' leaders focus their efforts on implementing a leader development program, providing candid feedback, and developing junior leaders through experience, they will inherently develop the future generation of leaders.

## Leader Development



John C. Maxwell, author of *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, wrote, “The true measure of leadership is influence...”<sup>2</sup> So how do we positively influence our subordinates? Think back to the most influential leader you had — whether from high school, college, the military, or the civilian work force. This leader likely had traits of charisma, loyalty, humility, passion, and empathy. It is a necessity for leaders in the Army to have a growth rather than fixed mindset. “Leaders with a growth mindset are more committed to their subordinates' development, and to their own. They give

a great deal more developmental coaching, they notice improvement in subordinates' performance, and they welcome critiques from their subordinates.”<sup>3</sup>

The first step in developing our future leaders is building and prioritizing a leader professional development (LPD) program. The program should not be tied to the officer or NCO — this is for all leaders and tailored to the audience. The LPD program should include tactical and non-tactical situations. Airborne infantry battalions cannot only teach airborne joint forcible entry; they must also include diverse topics such as career development and professional reading and writing. Leaders should utilize low-density military occupation specialties (MOS) to expand on how the organization's core and specialty capabilities function together. A broad, inclusive program develops well-rounded leaders who are accustomed to including all ranks and MOSs in tactical and non-tactical situations.

A technique that worked well in our battalion was the development of a team leader/squad leader university, a platoon leader university, and an executive officer university.

Figure 1 — Red Devil Team Leader/Squad Leader University

 <b>Red Devil TL/SL University</b> 							
UNCLASSIFIED//FOR TRAINING AND EXERCISE USE							
Mission: The 1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion, 504 <sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment first sergeants (1SGs) and platoon sergeants (PSGs) conduct a Team Leader (TL)/Squad Leader (SL) University from 09-12 OCT 18, in order to develop Red Devil junior leaders and standardize NCO roles, responsibilities, and expectations across the battalion.	9-Oct	10-Oct	11-Oct	12-Oct			
<b>Commander's Intent</b> To establish standards across the battalion on what is expected from team leaders and squad leaders based on the 1-504 PIR tactical standard operating procedures (TACSOP). <b>Key Tasks</b> • Finalize course plan and publish study materials and tests • Assign instructors for each set of course material • Coordinate for Area J, the enduring range, and any other resources as needed <b>Instructors assigned</b> <b>Land resourced</b> <b>Arms resourced</b> <b>Medical coverage</b> 1x FLA on 11-12 OCT <b>Knowledge test built</b> <b>Field Packing list built</b> <b>Chow request submitted</b> <b>Vehicles</b>	0600 Barracks walkthrough  0630-0745 Physical readiness training (PRT): Preparation drill, conditioning drill 1-2, 4 for the core, push-up (PU)/sit-up (SU) drill, recovery drill – 1SG Boyd  0930-1130 Motorpool formation: -Commanders comments -Maintenance and Preventive Maintenance Checks and Services (PMCS) – SFC Crawford -Beyond level 10 maintenance – SFC Crawford  1200-1300 Release for lunch  1300-1500 Move from Devil Field to Area J, AA LZ: -Vehicle recovery, self and wrecker – SFC Crawford -Field craft – SFC Jimenez  1500-UTC BN classroom: -General knowledge test- All 1SGs -Packing list distributed upon completion	0600 Barracks walkthrough  0630-0745 PRT: -Hip stability drill, -Military movement drill (MMD) 1, -300-yard shuttle sprint, -60/120s around Devil Field, -recovery – SFC Jackson  0900-1000 Devil Field: -Pre-combat checks (PCC)/pre-combat inspections (PCIs) and layout TLs – SFC Calise SLs – 1SG Smith  1000-1130 BN classroom: -How to integrate new Paratroopers – All 1SGs -BN, CO, and PLT METL – 1SG Boyd -How to develop a PT Plan – 1SG Littleton  1130-1400 MRE lunch 1200 Whiteslip w/ SSG Gonzalez  1400-UTC BN classroom: -How to conduct training (8-step training model) – SFC Jackson -Leaders book review – CSM Huynh -Select SLs put out packing list and route for 11 OCT	0600 Barracks walkthrough  0630-0745 PRT: TL led PRT, SL's develop plans AA LZ: -MRE lunch -ACE/LACE reports – CSM Huynh -Battle drill 1A, 6 – 1SG Sitz -Field Planning – SFC Crisp, 1SG Smith -Patrol lanes – All 1SGs -Recovery SOP – 1SG Romohr -After action review (AAR) class – 1SG Romohr -Course AAR – 1SG Romohr -TL/SL duties and responsibilities – CSM Huynh (1300) -1330 return to BN  0900-1130 Devil Field: TL, preliminary marksmanship instruction (PMI) class M4 – SFC Scarborough M249 – SFC Crews M240 – SFC Anderson  SL, Range Operations and Coordination – 1SG Smith  1130-UTC Move from Devil Field to AA LZ: -MRE lunch -Movement techniques, objective rally point (ORP)/patrol base (PB) ops – SFC Crisp, SSG Conrad -Fire commands – SFC Martine, CSM Huynh -Crew drills – 1SG Littleton -SL designed 6-mile ruck route and packing list put out -Return to RD AO	0600 Barracks walkthrough  0630-1400 6-mile ruck march from Devil Field to AA LZ: -MRE lunch -ACE/LACE reports – CSM Huynh -Battle drill 1A, 6 – 1SG Sitz -Field Planning – SFC Crisp, 1SG Smith -Patrol lanes – All 1SGs -Recovery SOP – 1SG Romohr -After action review (AAR) class – 1SG Romohr -Course AAR – 1SG Romohr -TL/SL duties and responsibilities – CSM Huynh (1300) -1330 return to BN  1400-1500 BN Classroom: -General knowledge test  1500 Devil Field: -Graduation			
Training Management (8-STEP Training Model)							
Plan the Training	Recon the Site	Train/Certify Leaders	Issue the Plan	Rehearse the TNG	Execute Training	Evaluate TNG	Retraining
Initiated 24SEP	26SEP	28SEP	NLT 01OCT	03-04OCT	09-15OCT	15OCT	N/A

These courses are taught at the battalion level but with feedback and input from company-level leadership and from the Soldiers participating in the training. These courses consist of both Army doctrine and best practices that can help our junior leaders excel in current and future positions.

Regardless of rank or position, don't let any opportunity pass to develop leaders at all levels. I remember my first rehearsal of concept (ROC) drill as a newly minted platoon leader; I was visibly nervous and felt as if I had the weight of the world on my shoulders. As I spoke to my battalion commander on the concept of operations, it didn't occur to me that I was, in fact, in the middle of a large LPD. But it wasn't just the battalion commander present; it was a leadership opportunity where all ranks of the organization were poised to help me. As I stumbled through my brief, my platoon sergeant mouthed "be cool" — he meant take a deep breath, relax, and "you know what you are doing." Leadership is parallel — my platoon sergeant was developing me, too. Leaders at all levels — platoon, company, and battalion — must rely on one another. My battalion commander didn't humiliate me during my first ROC drill, and my platoon sergeant didn't leave me to suffer alone. As leaders they embraced a culture and expectation of continuous development. Their presence gave me confidence for the remainder of the brief, for the exercise, and really, for the rest of my time as a lieutenant. ROC drills are important because they teach junior leaders how to conduct detailed planning and how to brief in front of a large audience. Use them to demonstrate and build confidence in all your leaders.

Live-fire exercise (LFX) certification exams and tactical exercises without troops (TEWTs) are additional opportunities for development. In our battalion, we required all platoon sergeants and above to pass a 50-question exam on surface danger zones, minimum safe distances, risk estimate distances, and requirements for the field ammunition holding area. While just one of many techniques, the examination ensured that our leaders understood the technical aspects of an LFX. We reinforced the exam with detailed LFX LPDs to teach leaders about the combined arms fight, expanding the message beyond infantry-specific tasks. During both preparation and execution, I provided feedback born of shared experiences, highlighting where I failed or had seen others fail, and that being re-set isn't failure — it is an opportunity to bounce back and improve.

Beyond the formal LPD and the opportunities provided by field exercises, the next step in leader development is a focus on reading and writing skills. Often these critical traits are neglected until an officer attends the Command and General Staff College or an NCO attends the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. If a leader waits that long to begin reading and writing, they miss a key development opportunity. A good technique is the use of the staff duty, an opportune time to give leaders intellectual tasks that develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. This may include providing feedback/lessons learned on recent training conducted, providing comments on where the leadership within the battalion or company

should focus and improve upon, or writing a synopsis on a chosen topic from a professional journal. Developing effective reading and writing skills helps leaders complete both routine and unique tasks. Effective written communication leads to clearly and concisely written evaluations, awards, letters of recommendation, memorandums of instruction, and operation orders (OPORDs). In the digital age, clear writing helps with interpersonal communication. Reading skills help leaders quickly comprehend information and cultivate a growing personal and professional knowledge base. Professional reading at the battalion should not be solely focused on military history or doctrine. Leaders benefit from exposure to a broad spectrum of information that helps them deal with the diverse formations they lead and the diverse problems they face.

Oral communication is tied to reading and writing. One intellectual exercise we used was to task the staff duty officer to do research on a battle and provide the battalion commander with a verbal review of the fight the next morning. The review included what decisions or actions could be improved. This provides basic knowledge, develops a leader's communication skills, and encourages self-study. Each attribute will improve the leader's ability to communicate with clarity and specificity, either in a staff meeting or an OPORD.

Communication is also tied to consistent messaging about the senior leader's leadership philosophy and vision. This messaging and positive communication reinforce the overall leadership theme throughout the organization.

## Experience

Trust is undoubtedly the most important factor in leader development. "Trust allows us to rely on others. We rely on those we trust for advice to help us make decisions. Trust is the bedrock of the advancement of our own lives, our families, our companies, our societies, and our species."<sup>4</sup>

As a commander, I used a theme to highlight how important trust was to me. From the beginning, mine was "Trust + Fitness + Discipline = Victory." Clearly, leaders can't just talk; they must also demonstrate their trust. They do this in many ways, but shared hardship is fundamental in a military formation. It is how General Grant, who in the fall of 1861 marched from Illinois to Missouri with his men, developed the utmost reverence among his men. Sharing demanding tasks with your subordinates at physical training (PT), in the field, or in combat creates a bond of mutual respect.

Trust is further developed through shared experiences. Our job as leaders is to ensure those experiences are both positive and developmental. Throughout our careers, at all levels, we hear that once we gain more experience we will be better able to fully comprehend our environment. But, how do subordinates gain experience? How do those experiences build or detract from trust and development? Leaders must allow their subordinates to fail at times. Leaders must seek opportunities to provide unspecified missions to subordinates. It is easy for senior leaders to micromanage, provide the answer, complete

the task, and deny junior leaders the value of experience. When senior leaders create an environment of micromanagement, what does this do for the subordinate's confidence, their ability to problem solve, and their ability to fight through adversity? Without berating them, teach them what is right, allow them the opportunity to grow, and allow them to make mistakes. This teaches two significant traits — resiliency and grit. Resiliency and grit are what push people through adversity and challenges.

Along with trust, leaders must create an environment of shared understanding. During certain times, leaders do not have the opportunity to explain in detail what their subordinates need to execute, but these instances will not create resentment and stalled action if this is an exception to an established environment of shared understanding. Subordinates at all levels will understand and know why they are executing tasks when leaders continually provide context. "People who come to work with a clear sense of why are less prone to giving up after a few failures because they understand the higher cause."<sup>5</sup> In any organization, leaders are responsible for creating an environment of trust — trust is paramount to the success of any organization.

### Feedback

Sir Winston Churchill said, "Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfills the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things."<sup>6</sup> If we know feedback is good for our subordinates and for the organization, then why do so many leaders avoid it? The reason is often because "[w]e humans do not do well when someone whose intentions are unclear tells us where we stand, how good we 'really' are, and what we must do to fix ourselves. We excel *only* when people who know us and care about us tell us what they experience and what they feel, and in particular when they see something within us that really works."<sup>7</sup>

Leaders at all echelons deserve candid feedback from their superiors. The candid feedback that leaders give must be based on the principals of dignity and respect, which includes potentially presenting uncomfortable truths. Throughout my career, I have found that subordinates rise to the standard they are charged with executing. Feedback goes both ways. You, as the senior leader, can improve or sustain your attributes by accepting your subordinates' feedback. It builds trust and allows you to continue growth and development. By having

junior leaders learn how to give effective feedback now will help them in their counseling sessions in the future. Too often leaders focus on the negative aspects of feedback when, in reality, they should focus on what systems are working and how these systems positively impact the organization. Another good technique is to have subordinates give answers on how they think they are doing and what they need to work on to improve.

We live in a world of instant gratification; with a swipe of your finger, you can make purchases online. So apply that to feedback — when a subordinate does something that is extraordinary, do not wait until the quarterly counseling session — give them that feedback immediately! Let them know they did a tremendous job briefing, establishing a local support by fire, or leading re-conditioning PT. Bottom line, no matter the task or the environment, give immediate positive feedback when you observe it. Once your subordinates receive this candid and positive feedback, the organization — and more importantly, the people — will excel. In 1805, Admiral Nelson of the British Navy emphasized the value of initiative by creating "an organizational culture that rewarded individual initiative and critical thinking, as opposed to simple execution of commands."<sup>8</sup> Instant feedback empowers junior leaders to make quick, deliberate, and dynamic decisions independent of senior leader oversight, promoting a culture of initiative.

Here is one example of how this feedback may look in practice: a forward support company executive officer is deploying to the field in preparation for a Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation. Prior to the exercise, the brigade support battalion (BSB) commander hosts an LPD on employment, occupation, and required personnel within

A Co, 1-504 PIR Senior Rater Worksheet																
Name (in no priority)	Ready to assume the next leadership position	Decision making	Thinks two levels up	Accomplish the mission	Positive / confident leader	Mentally and physically tough	Moral and physical courage	Team builder / works well w/ peers	Humble / unselfish leader	Effective comms (writing / speaking)	Accepts prudent risks / Initiative	Seek and accepts responsibility	Problem Solver	Technically and tactically proficient	Strong character, morally strong, ethically straight	Seeks self-study / professional develop
CO XO																
1 PL																
2 PL																
3 PL																
FSO																
X LT																

— = Below average; potential to improve; needs counsel  
 ✓ = Average; recognizes weakness and acts on it  
 + = Above Average; understands himself/herself and acts with minimum to no guidance

**OML (bullet / phrases that summarize why Officer is rated #1-7. Focus on key strength and weakness)**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Figure 2 — Example Senior Rater Worksheet

the field trains command post (FTCP) and the combat trains command post (CTCP). During the LPD and the training event, the commander publicly praises subordinates for their superb performance. After the training event, the battalion commander conducts counseling of all officers and senior NCOs. During the counseling session, the battalion commander asks junior officers their opinion on how the occupation and employment of the CTCP went for the maneuver battalions and if they had the proper personnel in the CTCP and in the FTCP. This gives the senior officer bottom-up refinement, and it also allows junior leaders the opportunity to learn from the BSB commander and to give some thought on what would work better in the future. This technique allows buy-in from subordinates on how the battalion can improve in the future. This antidote displays how the senior leader begins the training exercise with a formal LPD describing how to execute specific tasks in a training environment. Secondly, while in the field environment, the junior leaders receive instant feedback from the units they are supporting and from BSB leaders. Lastly, at the conclusion of the training event the commander formally counsels subordinate leaders. By executing in this fashion, senior leaders are ensuring the development of junior leaders throughout their organization.

Counseling is another form of feedback for our subordinate leaders. Counseling does not have to be done formally on a DA Form 4856. Counseling can be done in a green leader book on the side of a vehicle or at the personnel hangar while waiting to load the aircraft. Leaders at all echelons must take time to counsel their subordinates, whether monthly, quarterly, or absolute worst case prior to receiving their evaluation. Every leader in the Army (or in any large organization) is extremely busy; leaders must make time to develop and counsel their junior leaders. This is our legacy — this is how our Army will continue to grow and develop for the future. When counseling junior leaders, an effective technique is to use specific criteria so junior leaders understand how they are being evaluated and know where to focus their efforts. This further reinforces the

importance of shared understanding within the organization.

## Conclusion

Leader development is the responsibility of senior leaders within the organization. Leaders set the culture of leader development within the organization, and furthermore, leader development is the responsibility of every leader in the organization. Implementing a strong leader development program, providing candid feedback, and allowing subordinates to execute required tasks help shape and grow the next generation of leaders. As we continue to grow, mentor, and develop our leaders, it is essential that they are treated with dignity and respect. This is critical to remaining authentic and showing genuine concern and compassion for our people and their families. President Lincoln offered advice that holds true for leaders and subordinates today: “Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing.”<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Doris K. Goodwin, *Leadership in Turbulent Times* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership Follow Them and People will Follow You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset, The New Psychology of Success* (NY: Ballantine Books, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Simon Sinek, *Start with Why, How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (NY: Penguin Group, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Winston Churchill, *New Statesman*, 7 January 1939.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall, “The Feedback Fallacy,” *Harvard Business Review* (March-April 2019, 2): 92-101.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley McChrystal, *Team of Teams, New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (NY: Penguin Group, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Goodwin, *Leadership*.

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**LTC Richard P. Taylor** currently commands the 1st Battalion, 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade at Fort Benning, GA. He previously commanded the 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC.

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Photo courtesy of author

**Paratroopers in the 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment conduct a rehearsal of concept drill prior to a platoon live-fire exercise.**