FORUM & FEATURES

Building A Team

DANDRIDGE M. MALONE

War sure isn't a game, but thinking about games can sure help you learn about war.

Think about a football team — think about what it does, and how it operates. Now see if you can come up with a half-dozen examples that show how a football team is something like a unit on the battlefield. That ought to give you a pretty good idea of how teamwork works, on either the playing field or the battlefield.

How do you build a team? Let me lay out for you, first, an overall team-building strategy, and second, a number of specific how-to's for doing what one of those principles of leadership tells you do to — train your men as a team.

Fire team leaders build teams out of their subordinate individual soldiers. Squad leaders and above build teams out of subordinate leaders and their teams. In either case, there is one simple overall leadership strategy for building a team. It is an overall way of operating, not a specific how-to, and it has two requirements.

A leader must constantly, on a day-to-day basis, do things and say things that will convince each individual team member that he is a part of a whole team — not just any old part, but an essential part, a part that other individuals depend upon to get their work done, and that the whole team depends upon to get its work done.

The second requirement of the strategy is that a leader must do and say things daily to convince the individual team members that their

wants, needs, hopes, and goals are tied to the team's performance, output, and work. Each individual team member will usually operate in his own best interest. He'll do what he thinks is best for him. That doesn't sound too admirable, but it's a fact of human nature. In building a team, what a leader has to do is to convince each team member that the best way for him to get what he wants is through what the team does.

In essence, this team-building leadership strategy says:

- Convince each team member that the other team members and the team as a whole are dependent on him.
- Convince him that much of the whole business of reward and punishment, for him, is tied to the output or performance of the team he belongs to.

Building the complex kind of team that a battlefield requires is tough. A leader sure can't get it by asking for it or by just giving an order. It takes time, and thinking ahead, and the sixth principle of leadership: Know your soldiers and what's inside each one.

Beyond the general strategy, there is no step-by-step procedure that is very practical for company-level leaders to use. But there are about ten good team-building techniques that have come from experience and research. They've been around for a couple of thousand years and they'll work for captains, lieutenants, and sergeants.

Use drills. The best way to build the kind of team a unit needs is the way that's probably already obvious — use drills. Dismounted drill is good, but the best drills for the kind

of teamwork a unit needs most are spelled out in the ARTEPs. If a unit can't get out in the woods, then it should walk through an ARTEP on an open field. (I wonder if a unit could have an ARTEP parade?) If a unit can't do that, then it should try a blackboard, or a terrain model, or a map.

Drills must always be critiqued, and the performance of the team, and how each individual team member contributed — or failed to contribute — to the team's performance must be discussed. The specific places where the coordination and the timing of individuals and teams worked and didn't work should also be pointed out.

Use stress. High stress and heavy pressures applied to the whole team will build teamwork. That's a fact. The trick is to do it right. Events, exercises, and activities that are extreme challenges, and that demand a hard-core, all-out effort by the team and by each team member, will build teamwork. Add danger and that teamwork gets even stronger. The high stress of battle puts teams together so well — sometimes in just a few hours — that they continue to have annual get-togethers for years after the war is over.

In training, a unit should get as close to battlefield stress as it can. If you don't have a war, Captain, try a 100-mile road march; or run 10 miles with weapons, helmets, and LBE; or climb a mountain; or run a super-rough, non-stop, day-and-night, 24-hour battle drill over the worst terrain you can find. Do any or all of these high stress events as a team. Then later, start listening for the bragging and the war stories. About "Us." It'll work. Guaranteed.

Work by teams. Get tasks done by teams, rather than by "details." You, First Sergeant, can do a lot about this. Next time the battalion hits you up for "a 10-man detail and one NCO," check into the chain first, but then send a fire team with its own team leader instead of a detail. Chances are good that half as many men, working as a team, can do twice as much work in half the time. Bet on it. And if you're as smart as I think you are, you'll let the team know you bet.

Leave teams together. Whenever there are formations, leave teams together. "Break off and fill it in back there!" may make the platoon formation look better, Lieutenant, but what you're breaking up is a team and teamwork. How units work is more important than how they look. And you're supposed to be a specialist in unit work.

Whenever you, Sergeant, as the leader, must form your men, brief your men, move your men, work your men, critique your men, feed your men, or billet your men, do it the same way you're going to have to fight your men on the battlefield. Do it as a team. You can tell your troops, "Everyone be down at the motor pool at 1300 to clean the tracks." That's the way a Boy Scout leader might try to do it. It may (or may not) get them all there by somewhere around 1330. And, Sergeant, if you do it that way, you've just lost one of those valuable day-to-day opportunities to keep working on teamwork. Instead, form your soldiers as a squad in the company area, march them to the motor pool, in step, stand them at ease, give them their instructions with something like a 3- or 4-minute version of the five-paragraph field order (including standards in the mission part), supervise the fire team leaders, keep the whole squad at it until the whole job is done, form them up again, critique their performance as a team, march the whole squad back to the company area, and only then turn them loose to be individuals.

If you as the leader can keep your subordinates working and living as a team in their day-to-day activities, those ARTEP drills will automatically come out far better, and so will that thing that we call The Company when it fights on the battlefield.

Move men on manning boards, not names. Up on the wall in the orderly room or the C.O.'s office, there's a manning board. It probably looks like nothing more than a chart covered with acetate and filled in with a grease pencil, but it is the main tool for building and maintaining teamwork. The First Sergeant and the platoon leaders will be making the primary recommendations about who goes where, but the C.O. will be making the decisions. Never move a name around, Captain, without first thinking about the effect on teamwork and the team. When you move names around in an attempt to even out strength figures, you may be doing the same thing the Lieutenant does when he evens up his platoon formation. The board may look better, but the unit may work worse because you've unintentionally destroyed some of its teamwork power, some of that "extra."

Each time you move a name, what you're really moving is a man, and you're moving him out of his family. More importantly, when you move him, you're moving a part of something bigger. If that something bigger is a smooth-functioning team — a fighting machine — then what you may be doing is pulling out the carburetor. And a carburetor can't be replaced with an oil pump. As a general rule, hold manning board moves to an absolute bare minimum, and always consider first the effect on that team of which the soldier is a part.

Talk team language. There is a simple, guaranteed way all leaders can build teamwork. They should simply start using the team words — *we, us,* and *our* — instead of the three individual words — *I, me,* and *my.* When a leader starts leading by example with his language, his followers will follow. And they'll start talking and thinking more about *us* than about *me.* The first two letters in U.S. Army are US. The last two are "My." Think about it. It isn't a bad philosophy.

Build team reputation. Any man worth a damn will work hard to live up to his reputation. So will a team. Whenever a team does something that is both unusual and good, and when the members do it as a team, all the leadership of the whole unit should

know about it. When this happens three or four times, the word will get back to the team. At that point, they'll find out that they do have a *reputation to live up to.*

Reward or punish the team. Whenever a leader supervises a task that requires a high degree of teamwork, like maybe an ARTEP, then he should try to gear his supervision, critique, reward, and punishment to what the team does, more than to what the individuals do. He should do it in such a way that each individual *can see clearly that what he* wants most (or maybe wants least) depends more on what the team does than on what he does.

Punishing a whole team is extremely effective, but it should be done very carefully. A whole team should be punished when all the hand-offs are too sloppy or too slow, when there's no trust among the parts, or *when all the parts get to thinking* more about *me* than about *us.*

Set the example. Next to drill, the best thing for building teamwork is that all-powerful, all-purpose leadership tool that has been discussed so many times — the fifth principle of leadership: Set the example. It's not hard to do. If you're a squad leader, for example, you probably want your squad members to believe that for them the squad's mission is the most important thing there is. If you do want them to feel this way, then all *you've got to do is show them that for* you, the squad leader, the platoon's mission is the most important thing there is.

If you're a squad leader, never complain about the platoon's mission or the platoon leader in front of your followers. If you do, they're going to follow your example and complain about the squad's mission and about *you. Do you want your followers to* cooperate, work together, and trust each other? Then show them, by example, that that's exactly how you work with other squad leaders. From the motor pool to the battlefield, in any situation, followers will do as their leaders do. Good or bad.That's the plain chemistry of followership.

Emphasize differences. Find out *what makes one team different from* the others, and keep emphasizing those differences. It may be the kind of work they do, or where they do it, or when they do it — whatever makes them different from other teams. This is another way of telling team members that their team is something special, something different, something important.

Want to build teamwork in your company, Captain? Well, one thing that's always different in any unit is the unit's history. Send a letter up *through channels and find out what* your company did in the last war or two. Then sit down some time and tell the troops about their team at war, and how it fought in wars in the past. No lectures, just a talk and some stories. Do this two or three times, covering two or three wars, and watch what happens with teamwork.

There now, you've got a simple *strategy and some simple how-to's* for building a team. All of them are easy, common-sense things to do Will they work? Well, let's go back to where we started, to the football game. Find a team that nearly always wins. Read up on it a little, how it works inside, and what the coach does. What you'll find is the strategy and most of these same how-to's.

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A Neglected Skill

CAPTAIN DEREK HARVEY

When a new infantry lieutenant reports to his first assignment, he may know quite a bit about how he is supposed to help his company win in battle, but he often knows very little about another important concern — administration. He may not even think that administration is very important, because in too many cases, administration is a neglected skill.

Although the infantry officer basic course gives a brief overview of the subject, it does not adequately prepare a lieutenant in the many aspects of administration that he will encounter. One reason for this lack of emphasis may be simply a lack of resources — time, money, and instructors. But another reason may be that administration is difficult to teach; it not only encompasses a wide variety