

# COMBAT LEADERSHIP

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*“To rectify past blunders is impossible, but we might profit by the experience of them.”*

— George Washington

Comparable units with near identical assets, resources, and enemy situation templates (SITTEMPs) frequently enjoy widely disparate results on the ground in combat. Many times the cause for these disparate results is the one inconsistency — combat leadership.

The purpose of this article is to document the leadership and tactical lessons that I learned in combat both through personal experience and through observing others. I made these observations as a company commander on two combat deployments to Iraq — one as part of a joint task force (JTF) and the second in a conventional role in Baghdad during the surge. My deployment with the JTF afforded me the unique opportunity to observe many units in differing circumstances and their operations.

My goal is to draw attention to the importance of these lessons in hopes that future generations of combat leaders will not make the same mistakes. This article will not review or comment on current Army leadership principles, but rather focus on those aspects of leadership commonly violated in combat that seriously impede mission success or can lead to unnecessary friendly casualties. The article is organized into two sections: tactical mission execution and general combat leadership. While many of these lessons seem simple or are bedrock tenants of Army leadership, I have seen them all violated at all levels of responsibility.

## TACTICAL MISSION EXECUTION

### Execute Aggressively

1. Get inside the enemy’s decision cycle, and do not give him a chance to target you.
2. Seize the decisive point.
3. Prioritize objectives.

4. Employ all assets necessary to destroy the enemy. (Do not pull punches.)

Rapid and aggressive maneuver arrayed in depth throughout the battlespace at both company and battalion levels is essential. Avoid anchoring a unit to a confined inert terrain-oriented objective or maneuvering in an easily predictable scheme. Focus on prioritized assault objectives, most likely enemy locations, and developing the situation through tactical questioning (TQ), sensitive site exploitation (SSE), observation, and atmospherics. Proactively target the enemy. Treat every contact as an opportunity to destroy the enemy. Do not “pull punches” and employ whatever asset is necessary to ensure destruction of the enemy within higher command’s intent.

Tactical Application: Rapid and aggressive maneuver arrayed in depth throughout the battlespace forces the enemy to react to friendly forces and does not allow him to effectively target friendly forces. Additionally, it allows friendly forces to dominate the battlespace. For example, on some of our initial missions, our operations focused on a large, single fixed objective. Our forces were not arrayed in depth, and therefore did not disrupt the enemy or limit his ability to target us. It also concentrated our forces, presenting a better indirect fires target for the enemy. On subsequent operations, the battalion operated in greater depth across the battlefield. Additionally, maneuver was typically aggressive, rapid, and dynamic. This allowed us to dominate the battlespace and forced the enemy to react to our actions as opposed to targeting us at his leisure.

Application at the Company Level: In application, this type of fluid, aggressive maneuver consists of seizing the most likely enemy locations (assault objectives) at H-hour and containing the objective through movement as opposed to blocking positions. Once initial assault objectives have been seized, expand the search driven by TQ, SSE, atmospherics and most likely



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enemy locations. Non-linear clearance of the objective allows quicker, more efficient clearance while not creating a pattern for the enemy to exploit.

Execution: Aggressive execution of the mission saves lives and best completes the mission. Through executing our missions and observing various units and their mentality in conducting operations, it seems apparent that excessive concern for force protection or lack of aggression creates an environment in which the enemy is at liberty to target friendly forces at his convenience. Through planning and experience the enemy’s ability to target friendly forces improves and eventually he will start to effectively target friendly forces. We have to understand and adapt faster. Energetic and aggressive execution of the mission keeps the enemy in a reactive mode, constantly running, unable to reconnoiter, unable to plan, and unable to reorganize. Additionally, through aggressive, energetic execution the chances of killing/capturing the enemy increase.

For example, if you are engaged by a sniper, you can break contact, seek cover

and remain in position, or target and attack the sniper. By attacking the sniper with direct or indirect fires, at a minimum you drive him away and at best you kill him. If you break contact or remain where you are and do nothing, you only invite another attack. You may not kill the sniper the first, second, or third time, but eventually you will. If you do nothing or break contact, you never will and only embolden him. Additionally, you must understand the methodology of the sniper and take measures to kill him. Active scanning with optics and counter-sniper patrols disrupt his ability to target you and increase your chance of killing him. This same line of thinking can easily be applied to IED strikes as well. If friendly forces do not attempt to maneuver on or engage IED cells, there is little risk for the enemy and little reason for them not to continue employing IEDs. Terrorists will selectively target “soft” targets for this very reason.

### **Employ the Full Spectrum of Available Assets to Locate the Enemy**

The U.S. armed forces possess a tremendous array of intelligence and situational awareness gathering assets. Many units do not fully exploit the advantages that these assets provide. Additionally, as new assets, information, and resources become available, we must learn how to employ and exploit these resources as quickly and fluidly as possible, from planning through execution. Acting on real-time intelligence gathered on the objective allows us to act prior to the enemy being able to adjust or within his decision cycle. As an example, after killing an IED emplacement team, my company gained significant intelligence simply by moving immediately to exploit their houses.

While we have made great strides in using all available information and resources to target the enemy, we can improve on using these assets more fluidly and on fully disseminating intelligence. Examples include pulling all available intelligence from all sources and providing it to leaders as soon as possible in the orders process; using technological assets to positively identify (PID) the enemy on the objective, not at the detention facility; generating tactical intelligence reports (TIRs) on the objective through TQ, not after exfil. All of the assets and methods listed in this discussion can be used on the objective to more effectively

find the enemy.

There are many assets and methods by which we can target the enemy, specifically:

■ **Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB):** TIRs, DIIRs, special intelligence, patrol debriefs, etc.; combine these various sources to generate the most accurate SITTEMP, prioritize the targets and maneuver accordingly.

■ **TQ:** immediately actionable intelligence generated by TQ on the objective. TQ cannot be delegated to the battlefield interrogation team (BIT) or tactical human intelligence team (THT). The BIT/THT team’s competence varies, and proper TQ is a leader responsibility. Train/rehearse with your interpreters on TQ.

■ **SSE:** Technical exploitation to PID and/or generate immediately actionable intelligence; other evidence that PIDs enemy combatants, requires further exploitation, or generates immediately actionable intelligence.

■ **Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR):** ISR can observe enemy activity and drive friendly maneuver or CAS strikes.

■ **Friendly Ground Observation:** Units on the ground can observe enemy activity through active, constant observation with thermals, night observation devices (NODs), spotting scopes, sniper optics. This observation must occur both on the move and at static positions. Every Soldier is a Sensor (ESS).

■ **Emerging Intelligence:** During an operation new intelligence will develop that we may have the ability to act on during the mission, such as indirect attack points of origin (POOs), new intel reports, etc.

Throughout my deployments we improved at using all available assets to target the enemy, with increasingly positive results. Combining all pertinent, available Be On Look Out (BOLO) lists and TIRs with SI, and SIGINT generates a much more complete picture of the enemy presence on the objective.

### **Avoid Extreme Risk Aversion**

1. Build an organization not afraid to take risks.
2. Risks can be worth the reward.
3. Do not be afraid to employ unconventional solutions.

Leaders must mitigate tactical risks, but some risk must be accepted as an inherent



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characteristic of combat. Units that take smart risks are the units that win wars and battles. We must build units and leaders not afraid to take risks.

The training mentality of mitigating away all possible risks seems to have permeated into combat operations and at its extreme, becomes cowardice. A Soldier’s death in training is unacceptable, but combat is an inherently dangerous and life-threatening event. Extreme risk aversion in some units serves as an enormous constraint on operations. I spoke with one former battalion commander who, when conducting a relief in



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*Parachute Infantry Regiment and his troops conduct a joint patrol in Samarra, Iraq, October 21, 2006.*

place (RIP) with the outgoing battalion, was told that they did not conduct operations in a certain town because Al Qaida “owns” it. As we are the most powerful Army in the world, how can a terrorist organization own a town? As soon as possible, the new battalion conducted a major offensive on the town. While the battalion sustained casualties, they are credited with breaking the back of Al Qaida in that province and making a strategic impact on the global war on terrorism (GWOT). It is through the efforts of units like these that we win wars.

Risks can and must be taken in order to

win the tactical fight. Furthermore, risks can be worth the reward. During the surge my company inherited one of the most heavily IEDed stretches of road in Iraq. In order to occupy ambush/small kill team (SKT) positions undetected, SKTs were as small as possible. The SKTs were overwhelmingly successful, reducing the number of IEDs per week and destroying several IED emplacement teams. We mitigated the risk of the SKT with a forward mounted quick reaction force (QRF); however, there was certainly a possibility of the SKT being overwhelmed due to its small size. Other units failed in conducting similar

SKTs because of compromise due to the size of their force. In this case, the risk was worth the reward: the countless lives of convoy personnel that were saved.

#### **Avoid Absolute Constraints, Use Intent and Decentralized Decision Rights**

1. Give intent/operate within the intent.
2. Build a flexible plan, not a perfect plan.

Leaders must provide guidance and intent, avoiding absolute constraints. Risk averse and micromanaging leaders quickly enmesh constraints and centralize decision

rights. In subordinate units and leaders, centralized decision rights destroy initiative, creativity, responsibility, and accountability; and place the decision in the hands of those unfamiliar with the reality on the ground and the specific situation. While decentralized decision rights increase the possibility of actions inconsistent with the higher commander's vision, constraints impact a unit's ability to effectively and quickly adjust to conditions on the ground and cause the secondary effects listed above. Centralized decision rights destroy the small unit initiative and tactical flexibility that make our Army great.

General (Retired) Gordon R. Sullivan, the 32nd Army Chief of Staff, explained it best when he said, "*The paradox of war in the Information Age is one of managing massive amounts of information and resisting the temptation to over-control it. The competitive advantage is nullified when you try to run decisions up and down the chain of command. All platoons and tank crews have real-time information on what is going on around them, the location of the enemy, and the nature and targeting of the enemy's weapons system. Once the commander's intent is understood, decisions must be devolved to the lowest possible level to allow these frontline Soldiers to exploit the opportunities that develop.*"

During a prolonged firefight in Baghdad, a company employed AH-64s, in addition to organic weapons, to engage enemy fighters. Several civilian vehicles were destroyed and numerous buildings were damaged. The following day CNN covered the story, providing images of the damage. What CNN did not report was that upwards of 25 enemy fighters were confirmed killed. Within a week, Muqtada Al Sadr entered a truce with coalition forces, an event of strategic importance. Within that same week, MND-B implemented numerous additional restrictions on AH-64 employment. The resulting constraints added additional steps and precious time to the close combat air (CCA) attack process, hindering the ability of tactical units to quickly respond to conditions on the ground and win the fight. What was initially considered unnecessary or excessive force, may have contributed to a strategic victory.

Rather than establishing constraints, leaders must focus on clear intent. Soldiers and subordinate units, if they clearly understand their higher commander's intent, can then make the appropriate decision. For example, in the aforementioned situation, the intent could be, "Use CCA strikes only when absolutely necessary, and avoid any use of CCA that could appear excessive." Again, operating with intent versus restrictions does increase the chance of an error in judgment, but it allows for the leader on the ground to make appropriate decisions free of absolute constraints.

Carrying the concept of operating under intent and not constraints, leaders should not focus on building the perfect plan, planned down to minutiae, but rather a flexible plan, clearly communicating the intent and providing a logical framework for execution. In conducting more than 75 company-level raids, the target was only in the pre-planned building ONCE. What proved important in planning was creating a framework that allowed for flexible maneuvering.

### **Trust Your Intuition**

In many tactical situations, I "felt" a certain way about a situation. For example, I knew that contact was imminent or that a certain individual was an enemy combatant. In many of these situations, there was no specific, observable evidence to corroborate my

feeling. However, in hindsight, my intuition was never wrong and I learned to trust it.

During one particular nighttime raid, following contact enroute to the objective, AH-64s spotted figures moving on a nearby roof. The AH-64s reported potential weapons with the figures. As the gunships marked the appropriate building and a squad moved on the building, I observed a figure in civilian clothes walk out of a nearby house with an AK-47 rifle and start to look in our direction. Immediately, I placed my aiming laser on his chest and flicked off my safety. As I was about to pull the trigger, my intuition told me not to shoot. Despite all logic to the contrary, I did not shoot. I started walking towards the figure, keeping my laser on his chest. As I moved closer, another figure walked out. Something was odd, the other figure was very small, and the two seemed to be talking. As I got closer, I realized that the first figure with the AK-47 was an adolescent, and the other figure was a little girl. I yelled, and the adolescent saw me, dropped the weapon and ran inside. I then moved a squad to lockdown the house. Once we were done at the target house, I returned to the adolescent's house where, much to my chagrin, the parents denied the whole incident. I confiscated the weapon and told the father how foolish they had been, and that he was lucky his son was still alive. I still do not know if the father realized how close his son (and possibly his daughter) had been to death or that a gut feeling saved his son's life.

### **Choose the Harder Right**

Leaders must have the discipline and toughness to select the harder right tactical solution over the easier wrong. Generally, the right tactical solution is not the easiest. For example, an adjacent unit conducted counter-IED ambushes by parking a section of tanks on the main supply route (MSR). Logically, the enemy never operated near the tanks, and simply waited until the tanks had left to put out their IEDs. While the adjacent unit must have been comfortable, the enemy continued to attack the unit with IEDs and they continued to suffer casualties. Regardless of Soldier preference or comfort, tactical short cuts lead to casualties or sub-optimal mission execution.

## **COMBAT LEADERSHIP**

### **Lead By Example**

Leading by example is a bedrock value of Army leadership, but countless leaders violate this value or fail to appreciate and use its power. Simply put, Soldiers will look to their leaders for the appropriate values, attitudes, actions, and behavior. Meaning, whatever you expect your subordinates to do, you must do yourself. This concept applies to every aspect of a leader's behavior, and in my experience is the most powerful leadership tool available.

To illustrate this principle I will contrast two leaders. One leader (A) typically did not patrol with his unit. When he did patrol he would command and control (C2) maneuver but was otherwise uninvolved. In fact, at times he would even read novels if he perceived that everything was going according to plan. Contrast this with another leader (B) in the same unit fighting the same enemy in the same situation, who pushed his Soldiers and served as an example, assisting with TQ, SSE, searches, etc. Leader B made every effort to show his Soldiers how important the mission was and how it should be conducted with 100-percent effort. It

should come as little surprise that the latter unit (B) was extremely successful, while the former unit contributed very little.

### Communication in a Crisis

Listening to some leaders speak during a crisis or contact frequently gives the impression that they have watched too many war movies. In a crisis where the situation is truly critical, the worst thing a leader can do is add stress. In fact, in a crisis a leader must reduce stress. Coherent communication exuding confidence and control is how a leader must communicate. In an intense firefight, the worst feeling is to have the impression that a leader has lost control of himself or the situation.

### Everyone Makes Mistakes, But Mitigate the Incompetents

Leaders must remember that everyone makes mistakes — everyone. Unfortunately, in combat mistakes can cost lives, friendly or civilian. However, the severe consequences of a mistake in combat does not immunize Soldiers from committing them. Risk averse leaders will attempt to overcome the extreme costs of mistakes by consolidating power and decision rights, and sometimes by harshly punishing those who make mistakes. However, before taking any of these actions, leaders must remember that mistakes are inevitable and judge the mistake in light of the individual and the circumstances. The best course of action is to learn as much as possible from the mistake; and very carefully consider corrective action or punishment and the resultant message you will communicate.

One of my Soldiers once severely wounded an Iraqi with a warning shot. His team leader ordered him to take a warning shot at a moving vehicle because the Iraqi was driving suspiciously and vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs) were an Al Qaida weapon of choice in the area. Clearly, the Soldier made a mistake and poorly aimed his warning shot. The chain of command could have proceeded on a number of different courses of action: we could have prosecuted the Soldier, relieved the team leader, prohibited warning shots, or reserved the decision to take a warning shot for a certain level of rank. However, the Soldier was a fantastic Soldier with an outstanding record of conduct. Additionally, when the choices were to either take a warning shot, shoot to kill or risk a VBIED, warning shots were essential to force protection. Rather than prosecute the Soldier or add new constraints, we chose to learn as a unit from the mistake and develop more detailed intent (not constraints) for warning shots. We discussed the mechanics of a warning shot on a moving vehicle. We discussed the circumstances under which a warning shot is warranted. We discussed who ideally should take the warning shot and with what weapon system. We never again had an issue with warning shots and the Soldier went on to serve with distinction. This vignette also illustrates the importance of protecting your subordinates from unnecessary punishment, demonstrating your loyalty to your unit, and communicating the right message to your unit in both words and actions. It would have been much easier for the chain of command to hang this Soldier out to dry.

While keeping in mind that everyone makes mistakes, there are those that make them repeatedly or excessively, “the incompetents.” Depending on the organizational culture, it is not always possible to remove these incompetents, and they must be mitigated. I had one such person in my company. This person habitually folded



Courtesy photo

*The author completed two tours in Iraq while serving as commander of a reconnaissance troop with the 82nd Airborne Division.*

under pressure, lacked common sense, and was a tactical liability. No one in the battalion wanted this person, and I had insufficient cause to relieve him. As a result, I had to mitigate him. I ensured that he was never in a position to directly lead Soldiers while in combat, or in a position to get himself or others killed. Some units seem to consider combat units like a YMCA children’s soccer team, “everyone plays.” I disagree with this approach. Because combat is a life and death endeavor, we have a responsibility to field the best team possible and mitigate the incompetents.

### People Are Emotional; Manage Emotions

There is a tendency in the combat arms to think that we and our subordinates are immune to counterproductive emotions. This is simply naïve. A leader who fails to manage his subordinates’ emotions, is failing. As humans, Soldiers can and will experience the full spectrum of emotions, from jealousy to depression to elation. Furthermore, the extreme emotional demands of combat can intensify these feelings, increasing the need to address them. Part of being an effective leader is harnessing these emotions, managing or mitigating them, and using them as much as possible towards a constructive end.

For example, two units in the same organization were assigned less desirable, less important missions. Regardless of the original intent, the message from higher was that these units were not on par with the others. One leader (A) carried himself with obvious dejection and essentially shutdown, feeling as though he had been dismissed, all was lost, and his assigned mission was unimportant. The other leader (B) motivated his Soldiers to “show them how good we are.” He created a sense of outrage in his unit and focused their anger towards improvement and becoming the best. He inculcated a competitive spirit to be the best. Leader A left six months later. His unit was in shambles and had to chapter over 15 Soldiers for various disciplinary issues. It took many months of hard work to repair the damage. Within a few months, leader B’s unit was generally considered the best in the organization and was assigned the most high-priority mission, which they executed with great success.

As a teamwork-oriented organization, Army leaders sometimes avoid competition. Leaders constrain competition in an effort to avoid equity issues, or an overly competitive, self-serving culture.

However, healthy competition can be a fantastic motivator. When units compete, they can push each other to new levels of excellence. I always fostered healthy competition between my platoons, and I enjoyed seeing them push each other. If the competition ever escalated to an unhealthy level, I reined it in, but I am convinced they achieved more by trying to be the best.

### **Loyalty and Trust Are Paramount**

1. Avoid second-guessing the leader on the ground both during and after.

A unit cannot function in combat without loyalty and trust; the two go hand-in-hand. To fight effectively a Soldier has to trust his buddy and his leaders. A Soldier must also know that his leader cares about and is loyal to him and the unit.

Trust, or lack thereof, extends into tactical operations when ranking leaders question the decisions of the leader on the ground. This questioning is particularly counterproductive. Questioning decisions delays action, creates a culture of mistrust, and has all of the negative secondary effects of centralized decision rights. While most leaders who second-guess are doing so in an effort to assist, they must remember: it is extremely difficult to determine if the leader on the ground is making a bad decision when you are not there. If possible, wait until the after action review (AAR) to coach this leader into other possible courses of action, or refine the intent. While there may be circumstances where additional guidance is required, whenever possible, support the decisions of the leader on the ground.

One of the most frustrating tactical situations in all of my combat experience occurred due to second-guessing over the net. Two platoons of my company were conducting a raid to kill/capture a high value individual (a battalion main effort mission). My third platoon was conducting overt denial of IED emplacement and SKTs on an MSR 1,500 meters away. As we were conducting our mission, I heard a firefight erupt in the vicinity of my separate platoon. I could hear rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), PKMs, M240, and .50-cal fire. It was clearly a significant contact. I contacted my separate platoon leader immediately to determine if he had the situation under control. Over the sound of his M240, he reported that he did, but could use some help when we were able. The company (-) continued on our raid until the objective had

been fully prosecuted and declared a “dry-hole,” which was approximately 45 minutes to an hour from the initiation of the distant firefight. During this time, I had been periodically getting situation reports (SITREPs) from the third platoon, monitoring the traffic from the third platoon to battalion, and listening to their forward observer coordinate CCA support. During that time the third platoon leader reported to me that he was “amber” (running low) on ammunition and needed resupply. As soon as our objective had been declared a dry-hole, I immediately reported my intent to reinforce the third platoon. Battalion headquarters ordered me not to reinforce. I was extremely frustrated. I was not going to leave my platoon low on ammunition and in contact, but I did not want to disobey a direct order. It was one of the few times in my Army career where I was planning to blatantly disobey. I spent several wasted minutes arguing on the radio until battalion realized that my third platoon was in serious contact and needed reinforcement. Immediately, I reinforced, and the situation was resolved with no friendly casualties and without issue. Later, when I discussed the mission with battalion, I realized that they had not been able to monitor all of the radio traffic and did not understand the situation. However, the lesson I learned was that you should avoid second-guessing the leader on the ground. Train your subordinates so you can trust them working under your clearly communicated intent.

Other examples of trust-eroding leader behavior are: not considering subordinates’ recommendations, blaming subordinates or superiors for failures, taking all of the credit for successes, failing to support your subordinates or superiors, and sacrificing others for personal gain. These selfish actions destroy trust and prevent units from fighting effectively.

### **Continuous Improvement**

1. Always be thinking and working to improve.

2. If you aren’t improving, you’re getting worse.

3. Don’t be afraid of unconventional solutions.

Successful organizations never stop improving through constant effort and deliberate thought. This quality applies to all organizations, including military organizations. Through complacency, ineptitude, laziness or arrogance, some units

will stop improving, stop adjusting, and stop learning. While they set a routine and carry-out daily operations *laissez-faire*, the enemy plans, attacks, learns, and improves. If we fail to improve (relative to the enemy), we become worse. We must always be learning, leveraging new capabilities, technologies, and experiences. This also ties into risk aversion in terms of building units not afraid to try new techniques, unconventional solutions, or “thinking outside the box.” True evolution in our tactics can only occur when we push the envelope. As an institution, we must never be afraid to try new techniques.

Many unconventional solutions examples exist in the GWOT today. The “Sons of Iraq” Sunni militia is a perfect example. A more personal example is a tactic my unit adopted when conducting air assaults into Al Qaida strongholds. Because we conducted light air assault operations, we lacked vehicles. This limited our ability to exploit real-time intelligence gathered on the ground, and slowed our casualty evacuation and resupply capabilities. We eventually started using local Iraqi “bongo trucks” to accomplish these tasks. These trucks were acquired on the objective and returned to their compensated owners when we were done using the truck(s). On one particular mission, through TQ, we learned that the brother of a strategic level high-value individual (HVI) was in a house two kilometers away. We did not know how long he would be there and had only a few hours until the battalion exfil. Rather than cancel or delay the battalion’s air exfil, or risk this HVI leaving the area, we used two bongo trucks to transport an element to the target house. The element subsequently detained the HVI and returned without incident. Without the use of these bongo trucks, this mission would not have been possible. Many other unconventional solutions to tactical problems involve taking non-military specific technology and applying it to tactical problems.

### **Leadership Styles and Situations**

1. Different people and situations require different leadership/management.

2. Different leadership styles are effective; there is no one correct style.

Different people require different leadership. Every person is unique and requires an appropriately tailored leadership technique. For example, some subordinates need to be coached, mentored, and led

through a process; other subordinates thrive on autonomy and prefer to find a way to get the job done. All types of subordinates can be successful, but they require different leadership. A leader must try to identify what sort of leadership a subordinate requires and deliver as necessary to get the best performance possible.

At one point I had two very different PLs, X and Y. PL Y had a graduate degree from a prestigious university and had a track record of success. The other, PL X, had a track record of failure. Both PLs were effective, but they both required very different leadership. PL Y required minimal coaching, supervision, and mentoring. However, whenever I corrected PL Y, I was sure to explain the reasons behind the correction or decision, which his personality required. PL X did not respond to this type of leadership. PL X required pressure and constant external motivation. When I did not pressure PL X, he did not perform to standard and accepted less than acceptable results. In the end, both PLs were successful, but required different leadership.

Different situations require different leadership. As different individuals require tailored leadership styles, different situations require different leadership styles. There are times when leaders have to go to extraordinary lengths to get the mission accomplished, essentially doing whatever is required to motivate their subordinates. Often, the more critical a situation, the more extraordinary the lengths to which a leader must go.

In one particular running engagement, I was maneuvering my company from east to west towards an enemy position. As we were moving, we were receiving sporadic fire from the north and concentrated fire from the west. I was moving just behind the lead platoon dismounted, supported by our trucks to the rear. A section of Bradley fighting vehicles (BFVs) from another unit to our south was also supporting us. The BFVs were suppressing the enemy position in front of us. For some reason, I could not talk to the BFVs on my handheld radio, but my joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) could speak with them on another net. I was coordinating with the BFVs through my JTAC to walk us across the objective, while simultaneously trying to raise them on the company and battalion net. However, the lead PL only heard my transmissions on the company net. He did not know I was coordinating with the BFVs on another net. Movement kept slowing down in the lead platoon despite my efforts to get the platoon moving. I realized that they had essentially stopped, leaving us exposed at a major intersection and losing the initiative. As I moved up, I realized that the PL was concerned about blue-on-blue fire (that the BFVs did not see us). I assured the PL that I was talking to the BFVs and that they saw us, but the platoon was still slow to move. Apparently, the platoon was not convinced. Finally, I moved up to the front and starting walking with the lead team, showing them that the situation was under control. A company commander cannot best maneuver his company while walking point, but at the time, I could think of no other way to get them moving.

Different leadership styles are effective; there is no one correct style. There are many different types of leaders in the Army and each has a personality and leadership style of his own. All of these leaders can be successful if they remain true to their personality (do not come across as insincere) and maturely address and mitigate their weaknesses. I have had and have observed many different leaders and they all had weaknesses; the successful leaders were the leaders who appreciated these weaknesses and had a trusted agent fill the need. For example, if you are a very intelligent leader, but not much of a motivator,

then ensure you have someone who can motivate to fill that role.

## **Accountability**

### Do your job, make and allow others to do theirs.

Good Army leaders focus on getting the job done, getting it done quickly, and getting it done right. Additionally, Army leaders are unique in that they have typically performed almost all of the duties of those who work under them. This leads to a tendency at some levels to “just do it myself and get it done right.” While this approach may suffice for the short term, there are numerous long-term costs. The principal cost is that any effort or time that you spend on other’s duties and responsibilities is time away from your primary duty responsibilities. This means that either someone else will have to cover down on your duties, or that your duties are not being accomplished to the best of your abilities. Additionally, by performing your subordinates’ duties you are not forcing, or allowing, your subordinates to develop. Even if it takes much longer and is more difficult, when time permits, it is better to force the subordinate to accomplish his duties. If a subordinate is struggling, then he may require additional guidance, supervision, or assistance, but in the end, this will result in a better-developed subordinate, a more smoothly running organization, and more time for you to focus on performing your primary duties.

At one point, my executive officer was really struggling with keeping our vehicles maintained. Without going into details, the entire process had failed. After discussing it with him, I realized that the problem was a lack of internal systems, a lack of understanding, and a lack of communication with me and the battalion. When I had been an executive officer, I had developed many systems for tracking maintenance. I knew that I could quickly develop and implement the systems necessary to fix our vehicle fleet. However, if I fixed the situation for my executive officer he would not learn how to do it himself, nor would I have held him accountable for fixing the mess. Additionally, we were conducting combat operations on a continuous basis, and running the company maintenance would take my attention away from operations. Instead of solving the problem for him, I explained the systems I had developed as an executive officer, gave him examples, and explained how he could implement these same systems in our current situation. Once he came back to me with his solutions, I helped him implement them, both within the company and the battalion. The fleet quickly rose to an acceptable fully mission capable rate. However, over the next few weeks my spot checks consistently discovered that he was struggling with maintaining the systems and an accurate status. Again, I resisted the urge to take over the system myself, but rather assigned my weapons PL as the company BMO. This PL was slated to be an executive officer next, so it would be a good way to get him trained up. Additionally, by not taking over our company maintenance I was able to focus on planning and executing our operations and supervising the company as a whole.

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