

# Practical Lessons Learned for Dealing with Toxic Leaders and Bad Bosses

James W. Shufelt Jr.

Clinton O. Longenecker, PhD



**T**he U.S. Army and many American businesses share a common problem. Despite decades of attention and research, the presence of toxic leaders or bad bosses—leaders with undesirable and counterproductive leadership behaviors—continues to have a significant negative impact on individual and organizational performance. Numerous military

studies and articles over the last three decades identified this as an issue and reported on its negative effects, and Army leadership surveys document that it remains a problem. Similar studies in the civilian workplace reveal strikingly comparable data.

Regardless of where it occurs, the short- and long-term effects of these forms of leadership behaviors have

destructive and potentially disastrous effects on a plethora of individual and organizational key performance indicators. Much of the military response has focused on institutional methods to help identify, educate, and, if warranted, remove leaders who display these types of bad leadership behavior. Little, however, has been done

the welfare of subordinates.”<sup>2</sup> It also notes the individual’s responsibility to assess his or her own behavior through self-awareness programs, as well the requirement for all Army leaders to counsel subordinates in order to prevent or remedy counterproductive leadership. This regulation then identifies five types of destructive leadership styles

“Prolonged use of negative leadership to influence followers undermines the followers’ will, initiative, and potential and destroys unit morale.”

to focus on and better understand the subjects or victims of this type of behavior and provide practical immediate advice on how to best manage these difficult situations.

We believe that there are useful lessons from the civilian world that can help U.S. Army personnel in their efforts to maintain their effectiveness when dealing with an ineffective and/or toxic leader. We also believe that the Army may actually have some advantages in these types of situations that can help minimize the negative impact of toxic leaders, to include standardized leadership doctrine, useful leadership assessment tools, and multiple reporting methods.

The U.S. Army strongly rejects toxic leadership in its many forms and has devoted a great deal of time and effort to defining and chronicling this destructive leadership phenomenon. Current Army leadership doctrine explicitly defines and discusses toxic leadership in numerous documents. Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership*, describes toxic leadership and its negative impact on organizations in great detail:

Toxic leadership is a combination of self-centered attitudes, motivations, and behaviors that have adverse effects on subordinates, the organization, and mission performance. ... Toxic leaders consistently use dysfunctional behaviors to deceive, intimidate, coerce, or unfairly punish others to get what they want for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

The Army’s capstone policy for leadership, Army Regulation 600-100, *Army Profession and Leadership Policy*, further describes toxic leadership, explaining that the “counterproductive behaviors must be recurrent and have a deleterious impact on the organization’s performance or

that, if not changed, may result in removal of the leader from command, and, potentially, the Army profession: incompetent manager, affable nonparticipant, insensitive driven achiever, toxic self-centered abuser, and criminal.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Army’s companion leadership doctrine publication, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership*, discusses the potential impacts of toxic leadership in further detail, noting that “Leaders seen as abusive or toxic ... have higher rates of noncombatant mistreatment and misconduct in their units.”<sup>4</sup>

As can be seen from this brief review of the Army’s literature, the behaviors of toxic leadership have

**James W. Shufelt Jr.**, is an associate professor of senior leader development in the Center for Strategic Leader Development, U.S. Army War College. He is a 1980 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and a graduate of the Command and General Staff College, the School of Advanced Military Studies, and the Army War College. He currently serves as the director of the Nominative Leader Course, which prepares newly-selected nominative-level Army sergeants major for their initial assignments as senior enlisted leaders and advisors.

**Clinton O. Longenecker** is a distinguished university professor and the director of the Center for Leadership and Organizational Excellence in the College of Business and Innovation at the University of Toledo, where he has taught for over thirty years. He received a PhD in management from Pennsylvania State University. He is an active management consultant, educator, author, and executive coach whose clients include a range of Fortune 500 firms and entrepreneurial organizations.

been well-defined by the organization. In 2010, the Army began to track “counterproductive leadership behaviors” via the Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) survey.<sup>5</sup> These behaviors have remained at similar levels in the five years it has been tracked in this manner.

Current Army leadership doctrine well understands the existence of the negative impact of toxic leadership on subordinates: “Prolonged use of negative leadership to influence followers undermines the followers’ will, initiative, and potential and destroys unit morale.”<sup>6</sup> This is further reinforced by the 2014 CASAL report, which notes that while incidents of counterproductive leadership behaviors are relatively infrequent and tend to occur at lower organization levels, the impact of these behaviors can be significant in many different areas, to include subordinate motivation, work quality, commitment, and morale; leaders displaying these behaviors are “viewed as ineffective at building trust and exercising mission command.”<sup>7</sup> Having said this, Army doctrine does not say much about what those beholden to toxic leadership should do, other than reporting especially unacceptable behaviors by their bosses up through available reporting channels.

Some potential follower solutions to the toxic leader issue are addressed in Center for Army Leadership (CAL) Technical Report 2011-3, which presents findings based on the 2009 and 2010 CASAL reports, as well as other related surveys and literature on toxic leadership.<sup>8</sup> The CAL document recommends that followers take a variety of individual actions, to include leveraging existing Army 360-degree assessment tools and other mechanisms to enhance individual resiliency, improving individual positive affectivity, and utilizing ingratiation behaviors.<sup>9</sup>

Improving individual positive affectivity, one of the other action areas recommended in the CAL report, is based on research that indicates that followers with positive reflection of their own well-being, emotions, and levels of personal engagement “reported less negative effects from abusive supervision.”<sup>10</sup> The final area, utilizing ingratiation behaviors, is based on the idea that ingratiating yourself with the boss—making yourself appear less threatening and more likable—may serve to deflect the boss’s attentions to other individuals and thus reduce stress on a targeted follower.<sup>11</sup>

All of these actions are aimed at helping the follower to better cope with the adverse situation, reduce their

vulnerability to the toxic leader, and remain mission-focused. The theoretical underpinnings of the recommendations in the CAL report are sound; however, the recommendations tend to be overviews, rather than a more in-depth look at how subordinates can develop a sophisticated tool-set of communication techniques to utilize in interaction with a toxic or bad boss. The next section of this paper seeks to remedy that. Recent research into civilian workplaces conducted by one of the authors of this article is discussed in terms of concepts and immediate application for those employees seeking successful coping mechanisms for interacting with poor leadership in the military context.

## Toxic Leadership in the Civilian World and Lessons Learned

Similar negative leadership techniques can occur in the business world, where the constant pressure to produce more, faster, at reduced cost, often drives bosses to exert excessive and negative pressure on their subordinates to work harder, with negative and often unpredictable consequences for both individuals and organizations. For the past twenty-plus years, one of the authors of this article, Prof. Clinton Longenecker, has been actively engaged in an ongoing research program to better understand why leaders fail, the consequences of these failures, and what followers need to do when reporting to an ineffective and toxic leader. This research found that bad working relationships with bosses had a consistently detrimental effect on a subordinate’s motivation, willingness to come to work, engagement, productivity, and, when unresolved, damaged the employee’s long-term career success.<sup>12</sup>

These consistent findings prompted a follow-up study to better understand what individual employees can and must do to best cope with leaders who consistently display toxic leadership behaviors. In this study, structured focus groups with a wide cross-section of over three hundred veteran business leaders were prompted to answer the question: “Based in your experience, what are considered to be the practices that are most important in creating an effective working relationship with your boss?”<sup>13</sup>

Participants responded to this question individually and were then assigned to five-person focus groups to share their individual findings, discuss the importance of each, and come to a consensus around what the group

considered to be the most important factors ranked in order of importance. Each focus group was asked to identify no more than ten factors, which were then content analyzed to identify the frequency and common ground across the focus groups; eleven key findings emerged from this data analysis.<sup>14</sup> The following paragraphs discuss these key findings and their applicability to Army soldiers and Army civilians.

**Key Research Finding #1: Subordinates must accept the fact that they cannot change their boss.**

A powerful consensus among focus group participants identified a simple truth: it is virtually impossible for an employee to change their boss. This observation is not fatalistic, but rather realistic in that research participants agreed that subordinates must adjust their own behaviors and adopt new methods of interacting to accommodate the shortcomings and “bad boss” tendencies of their superiors.

**Military lesson learned.** This critical lesson—the subordinate must change, not the boss—is well accepted within the Army as it reflects the reality of command or supervisory relationships, both by custom and regulation. An advantage held by the Army is that Army personnel are routinely reassigned or promoted, leading to relatively frequent changes in the boss-subordinate relationship. For Army civilians, the personnel rotation factor may be less viable, especially in the situation where the toxic leader is also a civilian. While they wait, the military subordinate’s most obvious choices are simple: avoidance, deflection, finding a shield, or simple submission. In military parlance, it is called embracing a “suck-it-up and drive-on” attitude, facilitated by developing thicker skin—that is, increasing personal tolerance for this style of leadership.

If the situation is truly unacceptable, reporting is a logical next step. And if reporting cannot rectify the situation, civilians in the business world or in government service always have the option of just leaving the organization and seeking employment elsewhere. Key Finding #11 will discuss the options available to both civilian and military personnel who find themselves in these circumstances.

**Key Research Finding #2: Put yourself in your boss’s shoes.** The overwhelming majority of participants in this study agreed that it was imperative that they know and understand their boss’s performance goals and what their organization needs and expects their boss to deliver. It is important to understand the challenges and pressures the boss faces as these things can potentially

impact subordinates and their coworkers in powerful and dynamic ways. When it is clear that a boss has overly aggressive goals, too much on their plate, resource shortages, unrealistic timelines, or maybe even has a toxic boss themselves, it can make the subordinate more empathetic and put them in a better position to offer help. To gain this understanding requires emotional intelligence and great situational awareness on the part of the subordinate. This knowledge can be very useful in helping to put together a game plan that enables a subordinate to work better with his or her superior.

**Military lesson learned.** In many Army organizations, leaders routinely provide their evaluation support form to the personnel that they rate, both as a template and to help everyone understand their tasks and responsibilities for the current rating period. The better a subordinate understands his or her boss’s duties and responsibilities, the greater the probability that the subordinate’s efforts will directly help the boss attain his or her goals and hopefully reduce stressors and triggers that might cause bad boss behaviors. It is imperative that personnel proactively seek out any and all information that will help them better understand their superior’s roles, goals, and responsibilities to create this understanding.

**Key Research Finding #3: Get on the same page as your boss.** Study participants made it clear that once they knew what their boss was being held accountable for, it was *their* job to get on the same page with their boss and identify the results that needed to be delivered. When bosses are extremely busy, it is not uncommon to find “drift” between the boss’s and the subordinate’s performance expectations and priorities. This “drift” situation can be countered by ensuring that employees take every available opportunity to review and capture their responsibilities with their boss. While formal performance planning sessions are important, making a regular practice of creating a list of what is currently being on as well as the results being pursued to share with the boss helps mitigate drift. This should be reviewed with the boss to make sure that tasks and actions are properly aligned, subordinate efforts contribute to their boss’s success and help ensure that the boss clearly understands this linkage. The more dynamic the workplace, the greater the need for this alignment to take place on an ongoing basis.

**Military lesson learned.** Proper alignment of supervisor-subordinate tasks and responsibilities is logical and consistent with Army doctrine to nest

“Army soldiers and civilians should always execute some type of structured information collection and analysis process on their supervisors, similar to the military’s intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process, especially when dealing with a new boss.”

organization mission and commander’s intent within those of a higher organization and commander. Army regulations require routine counseling sessions that directly focus on leader expectations and subordinate execution.<sup>15</sup> The challenge is ensuring that these required counseling sessions actually occur, and when they do, are executed to standard and are accurately documented and, when appropriate, are distributed to other leaders who need to know this information.

**Key Research Finding #4: Work hard to know and understand your boss’s strengths and weaknesses.**

Focus group participants made it clear that employees and their superiors are linked together whether they like it or not. So it is really important for subordinates to pay close attention to their superior’s work habits, management style, and how they operate on a daily basis. Some investigative questions include:

- What motivates your superior?
- What are the boss’s likes and dislikes?
- What is the boss’s emotional intelligence?
- Does the boss have any personality quirks or idiosyncrasies that need to be accounted for when working with him or her?
- What things set off the boss?

Possessing this information should put subordinates in a better position to use their own emotional intelligence to find more effective ways to communicate and interact daily with their bosses. There is no substitute for finding out what makes a boss tick and understanding the things that motivate him or her. Failing to know and understand a boss in this regard puts the employee at a disadvantage when developing strategies that will allow the subordinate to both play to the boss’s strengths and deal with weaknesses.

**Military lesson learned.** The military application of this finding is simple—Army soldiers and civilians should always execute some type of structured information collection and analysis process on their supervisors, similar to the military’s intelligence preparation

of the battlefield (IPB) process, especially when dealing with a new boss.<sup>16</sup> No one is suggesting that every soldier or government civilian must be a psychoanalyst or psychic. Rather, they need to do their homework and at least attempt to better understand their boss’s background, habits, and personality traits, and how the boss likes to access and process information.

In many ways, this is fairly easy in the Army—leader biographies are readily available, especially for more senior leaders, and the informal communications networks between organizations can usually provide significant additional information on how the new boss operates and what makes him or her happy, and, conversely, what makes him or her go in the opposite direction. Key advisors who work for bosses with a history of bad leadership behaviors have a critical responsibility to help others in the organization to better understand the boss’s personality, expectations, and desired communication methods in order to better tailor approaches so that all members of the team can establish and maintain effective working relationships with the boss.

**Key Research Finding #5: Regularly assess the overall quality of your current relationship with your boss and conduct an annual Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis.** This finding makes it clear that it is important to make it a regular monthly or quarterly practice to analyze your ongoing working relationship with your boss. Here are some important questions to guide this assessment:

- What does the boss do that helps subordinate productivity and performance?
- What does the boss do that hurts an employee’s ability to deliver desired results?
- What specific things represent opportunities that could be used to improve the overall quality of the boss-employee working relationship?
- Are there any specific threats to the working relationship with the boss that could create bigger problems?



Focus group findings suggest that people are generally quicker to assess working relationships with their peers and subordinates but often fail to see the value in assessing their working relationship with their boss. Taking the time to understand what is working well and what needs work is an important tactical step to identify the things that need to be done to better manage the boss. This assessment will put subordinates in a better position to develop a strategy, or game plan, for improving their working relationship, which will put them in a better position to deliver desired results.

**Military lesson learned.** For Army personnel, this is a logical progression from finding #4—once a subordinate determines how the boss operates, he or she must take the next step and use that information to develop a plan to sustain and improve the working relationship. Enacting such a plan based on assessment of one's own strengths and weaknesses should be done prior to counseling sessions. Recommendations should be a topic to address with the boss in a judicious and carefully planned manner. In many cases, helping your boss to better understand and address his or her leadership technique strengths and weaknesses, especially as they may be seen by the higher headquarters, can benefit the entire organization.

**Key Research Finding #6: Communicate using your boss's rules.** Study participants concluded that it is critically important for employees to learn how and when to communicate with their bosses in order to keep them well-informed. Most bosses have a preferred style of communication as some do all the talking, others listen all the time, and others prefer reading. Also, some prefer more frequent but short interactions, while others might prefer less frequent but lengthier interactions.

Most bosses also have a preferred channel for communicating. It might be team meetings, one-on-one discussions, emails, managing-by-walking-around, or even the phone. The important point is that you understand how to proactively interact with your boss in a fashion that the boss prefers and that will increase the likelihood of effective interactions. You can use this understanding to more successfully demonstrate initiative by keeping your boss informed on the status of projects, important performance metrics, and information that puts them in a better position to make decisions.

When you demonstrate initiative and reach out to keep them informed, a natural by-product will be an

increase in two-way communication, which is almost always a very good thing! And, while there are exceptions, it's generally not a bad thing to be confident enough to ask your boss, "How are things going for you?" or "How was your weekend?" or to share a good book you've read or good movies you've recently seen. Fostering an appropriate personal side in communicating with your boss can normalize communications and make it easier to talk about important work topics.

**Military lesson learned.** Army personnel need to tailor their discussions and interactions to the personality and preferred communication style of their military boss. This is a key issue that needs to be sorted out early on in a working relationship: What is the boss's desired method for communication, based on the topic to be discussed? Some may not want discussions to get personal, believing it to be inappropriate or unprofessional, while others may see it as a way to divert attention from discussion of truly important topics or resolution of critical issues. Again, soldiers have to use the results of their leader IPB to figure out how to best approach the boss and create an environment and communications approach that facilitates useful, positive discussion, vice triggering the boss to respond in the opposite manner.

**Key Research Finding #7: Be proactive and keep aligned.** An important practice identified by participants was that of staying proactive and conducting regular alignment sessions with your boss to keep on track and to keep the channels of communication open. Regular alignment sessions create an opportunity to keep bosses coaching and providing the input subordinates need to be effective. One of the best things that you can do to improve your working relationship with your boss is to schedule regular meetings to discuss your performance, what you are working on, and to solicit his or her input. Lots of bosses do not always take the time to provide feedback and coach their employees and many are not comfortable doing so. Successfully implementing the practice of short, regular alignment meetings with your boss once or twice a month can do wonders to keep the channels of communication open and to normalize discussions about performance.

**Military lesson learned.** This lesson reinforces the requirement for regularly scheduled counseling sessions with a military boss, throughout the rating period, to include appropriate documentation of counseling session results. If the boss does not want to

do this, despite the requirement to do so, soldiers and civilians should document this issue and make additional attempts to schedule the required counseling sessions. Subordinates need to couch these requests for counseling sessions under the mantra of best supporting the mission and the leader's desire for success.

**Key Research Finding #8: Establish your brand and make it a practice to underpromise and overdeliver.** Focus group participants continually discussed the importance of developing their reputation as a person who knows how to deliver desired results the right way. It is important to ask yourself, "What am I known for at work?" Are you known for being easy to work with? Having a great attitude? Being a great team member?

nature of the military profession. Delivering desired mission outcomes in a timely fashion can have a powerful effect on your working relationship and actual influence with your boss while at the same time creating advancement opportunities. In many ways, this recommendation is counterintuitive with a toxic boss; rather than avoid that boss, you should seek out opportunities to demonstrate your value.

**Key Research Finding #9: Be a problem solver.** Focus groups made a strong case for the importance of being a real problem solver, not problem creator, in your workplace. They offer this strong piece of advice: Never identify a problem or bring a complaint to your boss without having a potential solution in hand that you

“The objective is to be the subordinate who is given the hard tasks, time-critical missions, and highly visible requirements, even if the boss displays leadership characteristics that might be considered toxic.”

Being a strong communicator? Being a high performer? Knowing and understanding how people at your workplace, including your boss, perceive you is an important part of managing your relationship with your boss.

Part of establishing a successful reputation is making it a practice to underpromise and overdeliver. Most bosses appreciate when their people exceed expectations, whether it is meeting the deadline for an important project, solving a customer problem, or hitting an important goal. Do you know exactly what your boss expects from you, and have you taken steps to manage those expectations? Our long-term career success is contingent on developing a track record of consistently delivering desired results. When you deliver what your boss expects on an ongoing basis, it establishes your credibility as someone your boss can depend on.

**Military lesson learned.** The military application of this lesson is simple: an Army soldier or civilian needs to quickly develop and maintain a positive reputation as a subordinate who is capable, competent, trustworthy, and reliable. The objective is to be the subordinate who is given the hard tasks, time-critical missions, and highly visible requirements, even if the boss displays leadership characteristics that might be considered toxic. Yes, the lead horses are always given more work, but that is the

have thought through. Otherwise, you will be perceived as a complainer or doomsayer. Most of our bosses have a fair number of problems and issues on their plate on any given day. Do not be surprised if you get less than a warm reception when you go to your boss with yet another problem or troublesome issue.

If there is an issue that you do need to bring to their attention, use your knowledge of your boss's modus operandi to decide on the best time and place to do so. And, when approaching him or her, make sure that you properly frame the issue to make it easier for your boss to understand the problem and why it is important. Then, take the time to offer up your ideas or your potential solutions to the problem.

It really helps if you have taken the time to write this up in a short and concise document; we all take things more seriously when they are put forth in writing. This tells your boss that, whatever the issue is, it is serious, and that you have invested the time to jumpstart the problem-solving process. Bosses typically like people that help them get their work done, so this is a really important way to build a better relationship with your boss.

**Military lesson learned.** Effective problem solving is the core task of the military profession. Regardless of whether an Army soldier or civilian likes their boss

or whether the boss likes or does not personally like a subordinate, a strong reputation as a proactive and effective problem solver should help them to get ahead of the boss and reduce the opportunity for bad leader behaviors. It is always better to proactively present potential solutions at the same time that problems are communicated to the boss. While the leader may reject the subordinate's specific advice or recommendation, the subordinate's positive actions demonstrate capability and commitment to improving the organization. Sometimes, this may even require the subordinate to make the uncomfortable point that the leader's behavior is the very problem that must be addressed now. The importance of pushing back, when warranted, is highlighted by Michael Useem in his book, *Leading Up*:

However wrathful your superior, however merciless the message, the well-being of those in your hands must remain preeminent. Pushing up against a vengeful policy coming down from above sometimes requires all the upward leadership you can marshal, but when the purpose is transcendent, the value of your intercession extends well beyond you.<sup>17</sup>

**Key Research Finding #10: Always show respect for your boss, even if he or she might not deserve it.** Study participants made it clear that when employees work for a bad boss, it is important to remember that this bad relationship is not taking place in a vacuum. While other people may not like your boss, they are also looking at you and assessing how you respond to your boss. It is critically important to always show respect for your boss and not engage in gossip, backbiting, character assassination, or making your boss look bad behind his or her back. Lots of people at work lead "dual lives" and have "multiple personalities" when it comes to their bosses. To the boss's face they are upbeat, compliant, obedient, obliging, accommodating, helpful, and even openly respectful. Yet, behind the bosses back, they might be the opposite. They might make fun of, mock, or demonstrate open contempt and resentment for their boss.

While we understand why people engage in this practice, here are a couple of warnings. First, these things never happen in a vacuum, as other people are watching and listening. When word of bad-mannered behavior gets back to the boss, it can spell career disaster for the backstabber. Secondly, it sets a terrible example for others and can have a real demoralizing effect on other people.

Finally, it also causes other people to wonder what you might say about them when they are not around. It really reflects poorly on the character of the person doing the bashing. There is a simple principle in this regard: if you do not have something good to say about your boss then it's probably best keep your mouth closed.

**Military lesson learned.** The effectiveness of the Army is directly linked to standards, discipline, and professionalism in all actions. Subordinates must respect the position of their leader, even if they cannot respect the person because of their actions or underlying behaviors. To not do so is to damage one's own reputation and credibility, and to open the door to retaliatory or disciplinary actions. In addition, the boss' leadership problems can never be an excuse for a subordinate to do less than his or her personal best on assigned tasks. This is a fundamental characteristic of the Army profession—the mission always comes first.

**Key Research Finding #11: Know when it's time to go.** The final focus group finding circles back to the first: it is important to remember that there is actually very little that you can do to change your boss. So, if a boss is prone to extreme mood swings, or has a destructive personality, or is openly disrespectful to team members, maybe it is time to go. Or, when you feel stressed out and you cannot get away from it, or you feel nauseous when you come to work, or your job is starting to affect your health, maybe it is time for a change. Or, if your boss is dragging the entire department down because of his or her bad behavior and ineffective leadership style, it might be time to dust off the old resume, because bad things might be coming. Or, if you are aware that your boss is engaged in unscrupulous, dubious, or illegal activities, you may need to report the situation to the appropriate authorities and remove yourself from the situation as quickly as is humanly possible. You must use your best judgement but know that it is important to know when to go.

**Military lesson learned.** This is an area where the military is fundamentally different than the civilian world. Every soldier in the Army is a volunteer, serving on a specific term of service. While an Army civilian employee may have the ability to voluntarily walk out the door in response to a toxic leader, very few soldiers can do this, even if they are retirement eligible, at least not without suffering significant disciplinary repercussions. Changing jobs can be a challenge for Army civilians, due to the rigidity of the government civilian





For most subordinates, striving to improve their working relationship with their boss is simply a good thing to do.



hiring, assignment, and promotion processes. On the other hand, the Army does have some great advantages, in comparison to the average civilian business. The Army has a common leadership doctrine that clearly explains leadership methods that are appropriate, as well as those that are not. The service has common rating and standard selection systems that directly impact the selection of individuals for promotions and key leadership assignments. A variety of other assessment tools, to include peer assessments and self-assessments, can help identify individuals that display the characteristics of toxic or bad leaders. Additionally, when Army subordinates have questionable leaders, there are a multitude of available reporting systems they can use to call attention to the problem. These include the existing chain of command, inspectors general, chaplains, equal employment opportunity counselors, sexual harassment/assault response and prevention advisors, and other organizational and community resources.

## Proactive Implementation Benefits Everyone

When a follower is faced with a toxic leader, his or her potential response options are much more than just suffering in silence or quitting. The focus group findings

presented in this article provide a range of potential practical responses that, individually or in combination, can assist a civilian or military follower when faced with the challenge of suffering under a toxic boss. Proactively implementing these important lessons can make life easier for Army soldiers and civilians alike, placing them in a better position to deliver desired results, which is the cornerstone of career success, both in the military and civilian business worlds. For most subordinates, striving to improve their working relationship with their boss is simply a good thing to do. Subordinates need effective and supportive bosses in order to be successful, and bosses need responsive and effective subordinates in order to be successful.

Soldiers and civilian employees both need to make it a priority to assess their working relationships and develop plans to make those relationships better, stronger, and more productive. Their careers and accomplishment of the organization's mission depend on it. Results-minded military professionals are well served by thinking through the ramifications of this research and seeking out specific points of application that will improve the effectiveness and vitality of their working relationships with each and every boss served over the course of their career. ■

## Notes

1. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 1 August 2012), 3.

2. Army Regulation (AR) 600-100, *Army Profession and Leadership Policy* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 5 April 2017), para. 1-11d(8).

3. Ibid., 9.

4. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1 August 2012), 3-6.

5. Ryan Riley et al., *2014 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL): Military Leader Findings*, Technical Report 2015-1 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Leadership [CAL], 2015), 56.

6. ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 3.

7. Riley et al., *2014 CASAL: Military Leader Findings*, 63.

8. John P. Steele, *Antecedents and Consequences of Toxic Leadership in the U.S. Army: A Two Year Review and Recommended Solutions*, Technical Report 2011-3 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: CAL, June 2011), 1.

9. Ibid., 33.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 33-34.

12. Clinton O. Longenecker and Laurence S. Fink, "Managing Your Boss in the 21st Century," *Industrial Management* 58, no. 3 (May/June 2016): 11.

13. Ibid., 13-15.

14. Ibid.

15. U.S. Army guidance on required counseling for soldiers and civilians is contained in AR 623-3, *Evaluation Reporting System*

(Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 4 November 2015), and in AR 690-400, *Total Army Performance Evaluation System* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 16 October 1998), respectively. AR 623-3 directs initial and follow-up counseling between raters and rated soldiers as a component of the annual evaluation process. AR 690-400 directs at least three annual counseling sessions for civilian employees (initial, mid-term, and final appraisal).

16. Intelligence preparation of the battlefield/battlespace (IPB) is a structured military process for systematically evaluating the effects of characteristics of the operational environment for

specific missions. Detailed instructions on this process are provided in Army Training Publication 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield/Battlespace* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 10 November 2014). In the context of this article, the use of the term IPB is a metaphor for a similarly structured process that employees should use to learn everything they can about the characteristics, competencies, behaviors, and preferred communication methods of their boss.

17. Michael Useem, *Leading Up: How to Lead Your Boss So You Both Win* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 262.