

HE PAST 10-PLUS YEARS of war have provided numerous opportunities for the Army to capture lessons learned for the future of leader development—for both officers and NCOs. How many and which of these lessons the Army will translate into actual content, curriculum, and pedagogy in Army schools or leader development programs is unknown. This article examines the Army as a learning organization and recommends the Army include studies on the human dimension in leader development schools and programs.

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PHOTO: LCpl Jeffery Wilson from 3rd Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, and soldiers of the Iraqi Security Forces take cover on the streets in Haditha, Iraq, while in search of insurgents, 4 October 2005. (AP Photo/U.S. Army, CPL Kevin N. McCall)

How We Learn

Because the Army is a learning organization, it is imperative that it learn from its history—both the good and bad. Such common reflective practices as after action reviews, leader feedback, coaching, and performance counseling all speak to a learning organization. Additionally, the Army currently has numerous knowledge networks under the AKO umbrella for military functions such as intelligence, fires, medical, maneuver, signal, and religion, as well as the Center for Army Lessons Learned and the Battle Command Knowledge System. These venues are top-down and bottom-up forums that disseminate and share information from the Army to the Army. On the Internet, *companycommand.com* and *platoonleader.com* are forums that share lessons learned and best practices at the grass roots and junior officer levels. All of these forums empower users to share insights and lessons learned, but that information may or may not become institutionalized in formal instructional, educational, or training material.

In his seminal work on the subject, *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge, one of the leading teachers and proponents of learning organizations, defines a learning organization as one "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people

are continually learning how to learn together."

He adds that learning organizations are possible because—

Not only is it our nature to learn but we love to learn. . . . Most of us at one time or another have been part of a great team, a group of people who functioned together in an extraordinary way—who trusted one another, who complemented one another's strengths and compensated for one another's limitations, who had common goals that were larger than individual goals, and who produced extraordinary results. . . . The team that became great didn't start off great—it learned how to produce extraordinary results.

Senge proposes that learning organizations be grounded in "developing three core learning capabilities: fostering aspiration, developing reflective conversation, and understanding complexity."²

Nothing in Senge's thoughts or words is contradictory to what the Army wants to achieve today or be like in 2025. In fact, Senge's ideas may help the Army learn more effectively and get where it wants to be in 2025 and beyond in terms of real, intentional, and systematic leader development.

What Senge discusses supports our Army's leader development doctrine, and the doctrine supports what he writes. The *Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS) for a 21st Century Army* (25 November 2009) calls for a "balanced commitment to the three pillars of leader development: training, education, and experience... our leader development strategy is part of a campaign of learning. It seeks to be as adaptive and innovative as the leaders it must develop." The campaign needs careful, thoughtful analysis of what constitutes learning and how to achieve it. Three critical aspects of a learning environment are content or curriculum, pedagogy (the art and science of teaching), and the student's willingness to learn.

David Kolb's learning-styles model describes different ways that individuals learn. All of them focus on some type of reflective thinking about what individuals experienced, read, or heard.³ Kolb's model is a good starting point to help us understand that every activity a soldier undertakes

has an experiential element that the soldier becomes aware of as he reflects and thinks about it. In other words, the soldier "thinks back and acts forward."

Completing the mission is only one part of a soldier's requirements in the operational environment. Thinking back about what happened and using that information and knowledge to influence subsequent actions for the better is another important requirement, and this equates to learning for performance. The very simple habit-forming attitude—thinking back and acting forward—fosters aspiration, develops reflective conversations, and helps us understand complexity. Army stories and vignettes often capitalize on this powerful learning technique. If we make an effort to deliberately and habitually reflect as we act, real learning will occur.

Donald Schon's work on reflective practices further supports the notion of thinking back and acting forward. It discusses organizations that focus on reflecting (and journaling) about experiences to improve performance.⁴ The common denominator is "systemic reflection" at the individual and team level—a habitual team or individual after action review in which soldiers and leaders make a conscientious effort to learn so that they will not repeat mistakes of the past.

New formal instructional material and improved pedagogy for Army schools and leader development programs will arise from systemic reflection and shared lessons learned. Consider the potential benefits to the Army if all soldiers involved in the more serious historical incidents in our Nation's history had systemically reflected on what they saw, thought, and did, and the Army had captured and catalogued the information they provided to use in its leader development programs.

Lessons Learned for Commanders and Leaders

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) have provided countless stories from which to learn. Staff Sergeants Salvatore Giunta and Robert Miller and Private First Class Ross McGinnis displayed selfless service, loyalty, and personal courage, as have countless other soldiers and leaders, named and unnamed, who have set the example, taken the initiative, performed courageously, and chosen the harder right rather than the easier wrong.

However, as is often the case in human nature, much learning and development comes because of failures or negative psychological and emotional events. Without question, the vast majority of soldiers in combat have done, and are doing, the right thing under difficult circumstances—but we also know that bad things are going to happen—they always do. And our adversaries will use the media, the Internet, and social networking to cleverly exploit the slightest misstep by U.S. forces for their own strategic and tactical purposes.

Analysis of the unfortunate and tragic U.S. incidents that have occurred in OIF and OEF provides common themes, insights, and lessons learned (tangible "take-aways") that leaders should be aware of and look for, both in themselves and in their soldiers.

The purpose here is not to—

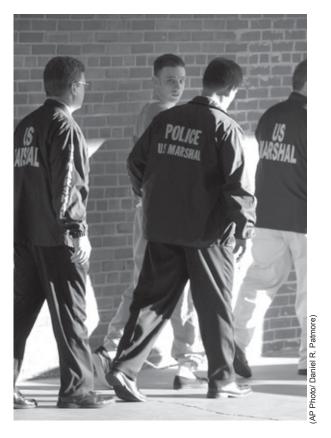
- Dwell on or highlight the bad stuff.
- Second-guess decisions.
- Criticize with the benefit of hindsight.
- Discuss the personalities involved in the events.
 - Rehash or re-tell the stories.

Our purpose is to help Army leaders learn—really learn. We want to capture and articulate what can, and arguably should, be put in leaders' kit bags (in this case their hearts and brains) in terms of the human dimension of war to better equip them to look out for and not make the same mistakes made in the past. We also want to raise awareness of common themes that have occurred in combat over the years—and will continue for years to come.

What follows are brief summaries of some highprofile cases from OEF and OIF:

The "kill team." A small group of soldiers in the 2nd Infantry Division allegedly formed a "kill team" in late 2009 or early 2010. Some of the team members allegedly killed two or three unarmed and nonthreatening Afghans, then staged the scenes to make it look as if the deaths were combat related. They also allegedly committed other violations of regulations and law, such as collecting war trophies and photographing team members with dead bodies.

The Haditha killings. In November 2005 in Haditha, Iraq, 24 Iraqis were allegedly killed by U.S. Marines as part of a retribution attack after a convoy from the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, was hit by an improvised explosive device that killed



U.S. marshals remove former 101st Airborne Division PFC Steven Dale Green from the courthouse after Green was sentenced to life in prison, 21 May 2009. Green was convicted of raping and killing an Iraqi teen and murdering her family.

Lance Corporal Miguel Terrazas and severely wounded another marine. At least three officers were officially reprimanded for failing to properly report and investigate the killings. All criminal charges against six marines were dropped and one marine was prosecuted and found not guilty. The squad leader was recently given a plea deal and found guilty of negligent dereliction of duty.

The canal killings. Three noncommissioned officers from the 172nd Brigade Combat Team were found guilty of executing four Iraqi detainees on or around April 2007. These "canal killings" (as they were called on a CNN documentary about them) were allegedly a response to detainees being released—after having been detained only a few days—and immediately returning to the fight.

Samarra murders. Four soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) were found guilty of killing three detainees in May 2006 during Operation Iron Triangle near Samarra, Iraq. Allegedly, the

soldiers released the detainees and then shot them to make it look like an escape attempt.

Tigris River bridge incident. In January 2004, soldiers from the 4th Infantry Division allegedly forced two Iraqis off a bridge over the Tigris River. One of the Iraqis died. An officer and an NCO were found guilty of crimes related to this incident (assault and obstruction of justice). During the investigation it was alleged that the battalion commander wanted to cover up the bridge incident.

Mahmudiya murders and rape. In March 2006, near Mahmudiya, Iraq, four soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) killed four Iraqi noncombatants and raped one of them before killing her. All four soldiers were found guilty of rape and murder.

Abu Ghraib. Eleven soldiers were found guilty of detainee abuse and other crimes in connection with this well-publicized case in Abu Ghraib prison, Iraq.

Bagram detainee abuse. In the spring and summer of 2002, at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, soldiers were allegedly involved in detainee abuse cases, which were featured on a CNN documentary, "Taxi to the Dark Side." At least 15 personnel were charged with crimes and five were convicted.

The eight incidents briefly described above, along with others from all conflicts (most notably the My Lai incident in Vietnam in 1968) highlight what *can* happen in war. Clearly, the incidents are not a reflection of our Army, our professional ethic, or the seven Army Values. In addition, they may not be examples of leadership failures.

They do indicate a need for increased leader education about indicators of ethics abdication. Additionally, we must face the reality that the military is a reflection of society, and one of the incidences—the rape and murder at Mahmudiya, Iraq—was likely in part a result of a criminal element within the ranks.

Most important from a learning perspective is the fact that the incidents were a result of some, if not all, of nine psychological and emotional constructs that can be a consequence of a stressful, complex, uncertain, and highly volatile combat environment. The nine constructs are:

Authorization. Authorization is the perception that the chain of command sanctions, approves, or directs a particular behavior, i.e., "I was just

following orders," or "This is what my leaders want/ expect me to do."

Transfer of responsibility. Transfer of responsibility is the perception that some other person bears the responsibility for an unethical act, i.e., "Someone else is responsible."

Rountinization. Routinization occurs when soldiers gradually acculturate to unethical actions or abuses. Unethical behavior simply becomes routine, i.e., "It's just what we do." An athlete who has taken performance enhancing drugs for years or teenagers paying for one movie and watching two or three in a cineplex are civilian examples. The routine and daily execution of the "final solution" by Nazi Germany during World War II is history's most horrendous example of routinitization.

Dehumanization/disqualification. These occur when soldiers lose respect for others or think that others are "below them." Soldiers may feel like they are being forced to protect or help people who are not like them and who they do not like. During the Vietnam War, use of the derogatory terms "gooks" or "slopes" indicated that some soldiers had dehumanized the local people.

Moral disengagement. Moral disengagement occurs when soldiers are so physically, mentally, psychologically, and emotionally stressed and exhausted that they cognitively disengage from moral and ethical reasoning or simply do not think about it. This usually takes the form of some kind of self-deception (lying to themselves), rationalization (the ends justifies the means), or even "mindlessness" or "mind-numbing." It often results in routinization of unethical behaviors. In some cases, a soldier may simply not think in terms of right and wrong or may not be thinking at all—just acting without thinking.

Bracketed morality. Bracketed morality refers to a soldier assigning a different set of values or beliefs in one context (for example, while deployed) as opposed to another (while back "in the world"). Or, put another way, "What happens in theater stays in theater."⁵

Misplaced loyalty. This refers to a soldier placing his loyalty to other soldiers (battle buddies) or the small unit higher than the organization's values—the Seven Army Values. A soldier committing an unethical act to take care of or cover for a squad mate is an example.

Peer pressure. Peer pressure is the influences of the group or unit that can override a soldier's ability to act or think individually (a lack of moral courage).

Groupthink. Groupthink is similar to peer pressure when the weight of the group's ideas overrides the soldier's ability to think and act alone (a lack of moral courage).

Some of the constructs above can act alone on a soldier's thinking and emotional well-being, although they normally work in combination. When several of these constructs in combination influence a soldier, bad things may happen. Arguably, all nine of them influenced soldier and leader actions at My Lai and at Abu Ghraib. Some or all played a significant role in the other incidents. Although there are volumes of academic research on these constructs, they really are not complicated for Army leaders to understand or identify.6 Army commanders and leaders, both officers and NCOs, are intelligent, educated, and well-meaning professionals. Their awareness of "what can happen" may be all it takes to help mitigate these threats. More important from the leader development perspective is that these psychological and emotional threats should be known and understood by commanders and leaders. They should discuss them at command and staff meetings and during after action reviews and integrate them into predeployment training. Even more dogmatically, they could be checklist items for leaders to carry with them.

The nine constructs are human issues. The Army is in the business of leading human beings—individual, emotive, thoughtful, distinct people. No two are the same. You cannot produce the exact same model of them on an assembly line year after year. No rigid "scientific method" will influence people to accomplish the mission. Training soldiers—and developing them into leaders—is the work of thoughtful craftsmen, not the processing of thousands of parts that come together to complete the organization. Because individual free will exists, friction, uncertainty, psychological interaction, and chance will also exist. Combat leaders must understand the complex nature of human beings.

The statements below, taken from investigations and discussions of the incidents above and others,

... psychological and emotional threats should be known and understood by commanders and leaders.

are examples of what leaders should listen for as signs that a soldier may be suffering from some of these threats:

"He displayed pure hatred for the enemy and often referred to them as savages."

"Are we going to protect the population or kill insurgents?"

"When the world you thought was made of concrete turns out to be smoke and mirrors, the results can be devastating."

"I don't care if I die."

"We are undermanned and no one gives a damn."

"Certain people are not to come back alive."

"The Army has great leaders and morally bankrupt leaders."

"I challenge you to imagine the frustration felt after being engaged in firefights for several hours with the enemy and then capturing them, only to have them released two days later because you're told the holding area needs more information on them."

"Don't tell them about ."

"The climate in the unit was toxic."

"We repeatedly found ourselves fighting the same enemy again and again."

"Kill all military-aged males on the objective."

"We need more kills."

Of course, these quotes must be taken in context. As stand-alone quotes, they may have a negative or threatening meaning, while in context, they may not mean a problem exists at all. Context matters. But if a leader hears remarks like the ones just above, his radar screen should blip with a cautionary note and he should start asking probing questions. In addition, leaders should look out for soldiers who behave erratically or anti-socially. For example, a soldier torturing or killing dogs and cats would be an obvious warning sign.

Interestingly (and coincidentally) after the My Lai incident, Lieutenant General William Peers' investigation found nine factors that influenced that tragic event:

- Lack of proper training.
- Attitude toward the local people (lack of cultural sensitivity).
 - Permissive attitude.
 - Psychological factors.
 - Organizational factors.
 - Nature of the enemy.
 - Plans, orders, and commander's intent.
 - Attitude of the government officials.
 - Leadership. 7

The same psychological constructs that were the proximate cause of My Lai are still a threat to our soldiers and leaders and will always be. From a learning perspective, the nine constructs previously discussed are a subset of the nine factors found at My Lai-the attitude toward the locals, psychological factors, the nature of the enemy, plans and orders, and leadership. This dates back to 1968 and highlights the need to learn, really learn, from the past. Of course, atrocities by U.S. soldiers have occurred throughout U.S. wars to include during World War II with the killing of German prisoners at Dachau, Germany.8 They also include the killing of German and Italian prisoners at Biscari, Italy. These historical examples are powerful reminders of how the dark side of warfare can influence soldiers' and leaders' thoughts. emotions, and behaviors.

Other Recommendations

Other curriculum additions we propose involve contextual and environmental challenges (as opposed to psychological constructs) that soldiers and leaders might experience while deployed. Teaching and discussing these and others challenges will better prepare future combat leaders for some of the challenges they could face. This list of challenges is certainly not complete:

- Winning tactically but losing operationally or strategically.
 - Reporting of events—truthful or otherwise.
 - Corruption and bribes.
 - Contractors in the battlespace.
 - Lack of resources.
 - Unrealistic expectations in an area of operations.
- Commanders out of touch with reality at lower levels.
 - Soldiers stretched too thin.

Some challenges on this list are clearly outside the average private to staff sergeant's thought process and influence. In fact, squad leaders and even platoon sergeants and platoon leaders may have very little influence over most of these things—but leaders at all levels should be aware of them. Other challenges leaders will have to be cognizant of and likely address include—

- Decisions regarding escalation of force.
- Dropping or planting weapons.
- War trophies.
- Revenge motives.
- The need to control their own and their soldiers' emotions
- The attitude of "If no one talks, no one will find out"

These are the kinds of things that a squad leader, platoon sergeant, or platoon leader can directly control. They are individual leader challenges but also commander issues—and influenced by command climate. The leader has to recognize when soldiers feel threatened and determine when he needs to resort to an escalation of force. The leader chooses (or allows subordinates to choose) to carry a spare weapon on patrol to drop next to a shooting victim to make it appear the patrol was fired upon. Leaders create a reality that justifies their actions when deployed. Leaders allow soldiers to give in to lesser instincts and succumb to blood lust. Leaders allow killing for revenge. Clearly, the Army does not condone these things, nor does it equivocate that they might be permitted in some circumstances. These are first and foremost individual choices and must be seen that way. But strong, educated, and knowledgeable leaders and leadership can influence individual choices

Leaders must be able to—

- Recognize a noncombatant.
- Understand the risks to and treatment of noncombatants.
- Recognize and know the risks to legally protected sites.
 - Provide a clear commander's intent.
 - Identify a questionable command climate.
- Know when to intervene to stop wrongdoing of others.

All of these things should be addressed by the institution and the command—these are leader issues. Contextually they all begin with command

climate and are all about leaders being able to control their own and their soldiers' emotions. First, the leader must master self-awareness and self-management, and then look at things in a political and emotional context. Only when he has mastered that can he set the tone that will address the other items (noncombatants, risk, historically protected sites, and other responsibilities).

From a pedagogical perspective in a school environment or officer and noncommissioned officer professional development program, leaders could analyze and discuss real vignettes while integrating the nine constructs recommended within a case study methodology. This technique would require researching the facts of each case, then discussing the human dimension aspects in context. The challenge with this case study technique would be ensuring that the real personalities involved in the stories are removed from the learning environment unless the actual knowledge of the personalities involved enhances the learning experience. The goal of the sessions should be real learning-not "protection of reputations." Students could reflect on and discuss insights and lessons learned from their knowledge, experiences, and understanding of the cases. Of course, integrating similar vignettes into pre-deployment scenarios and training would also be an effective technique of learning from the past and enhancing leader development for the future.

Real Learning via Self-Awareness and Self-Management

Learning, growing, and developing are life-long choices that individuals and organizations make they don't just happen. Being a life-long learner is a conscious choice that requires a high level of self-awareness and self-management. 10 Leaders need to be self-aware enough to know both what they do know and what they do not know, and when, where, and what they need to learn. For example, life-long learners must be self-aware enough to know that they lack knowledge in some areas, and then take the steps to learn or improve in those areas-self-management. The leaders who think they know it all or have nothing else to learn are setting up themselves, their units, and their missions for failure—or worse. We have introduced some specific topics we feel leaders need to know in a combat environment.

For professionally grounded leaders to understand, learn, and adapt, they must also intentionally and habitually practice self-management, which should



(U.S. Air Force, TSGT Manuel J. Martinez)

U.S. soldiers serving with the 10th Special Forces Group gather at Fort Walton Beach, FL, 1 March 2011, before a water training mission during Emerald Warrior 2011. Emerald Warrior is an annual two-week joint/combined tactical exercise designed to leverage lessons learned from operations to provide trained and ready forces to combatant commanders.

flow directly from being self-aware (of note, one can be self-aware without self-managing). The leaders, being consciously aware of what and how they are thinking (meta-cognition) and feeling, must then regulate those thoughts and feelings to best fit the context they are experiencing. Self-managing leaders must effectively focus and control their thinking and emotions to better control themselves and lead their soldiers. Being more knowledgeable and aware of the human dimension and the concepts and constructs we have introduced can only make for better leaders.

Army leaders primarily lead people, not organizations, and the development and understanding of people (the human dimension) should be a fundamental purpose of all leader development programs—as is being tactically and technically proficient. Equally important, leaders should be in programs to study themselves (to develop and practice self-awareness)—who they are, what formed them, how they think, why they think that way, and the potential consequences of decisions based on their thought processes and mental models.¹¹

We recommend making self-awareness a focus of leader development. Our contention is that by concentrating a large part of our efforts inward, we will develop leaders of known moral character, with the ability to critically view their environment (including their soldiers), look out for common threats in the human dimension, and make decisions consistent with the values of the nation and the Army and that advance the commander's intent and mission. Real leader development begins with one's self.¹²

The more knowledge of human behavior and the human dimension leaders have, the more they will understand and potentially influence it. Firm knowledge of the psychological and emotional constructs and recurring themes we have recommended can be a start point. For example, leaders' thoughts and emotions may drive them to seek some kind of irrational revenge after the tragic loss of some of their soldiers to an immoral adversary. How (and if) leaders regulate this revenge motive (both cognitively and emotionally) will affect their decision cycle, their ethical reasoning, and ultimately their behavior.

Notably, the Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness project with the University of Pennsylvania to enhance resilience in soldiers and their families

is a wonderful and effective means to teach selfawareness and self-management. ¹³ A significant portion of the project stems from the university's psychology department and attempts to teach emotion regulation, impulse control, and causal analysis. These three skills are classic examples of self-awareness and self-regulation. For example, the "ABC" (activation event, belief, consequences), "avoid thinking traps" (errors in thinking), and "detect icebergs" (deep-seated mental models) skills teach the student how to practice self-awareness and self-regulation.¹⁴ Leaders who are knowledgeable of the threats and constructs we have discussed and can habitually practice the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness skills will more effectively understand themselves, control their thoughts and behaviors, lead their soldiers, mitigate threats, ensure ethical behaviors, and accomplish the mission.

Summary

In combat, leaders must be aware of the many negative psychological and emotional effects that the stresses and violence of combat may have on their soldiers: the nine constructs we have discussed. Sound pedagogy and planned training throughout our Army can educate, train, and develop our leaders to—

- Recognize threatening signs in their soldiers.
- Recognize threatening signs in themselves.
- Ethically reason.
- Recognize an ethical situation that may not be self-evident.

The Center for the Army Profession and Ethic is addressing these last two areas. Self-aware leaders should habitually ask themselves and their trusted subordinates if there are any unhealthy signs or indicators in their units. Self-aware commanders should also habitually ask their subordinates what ethical challenges their units are facing or may face in the future.

If this ability or knowledge requires a checklist, so be it. The material for the checklist and the curriculum is based on years of lessons learned from our Army—a learning organization. Given the strategic environment in terms of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the time seems right to focus on and improve our leader-development schools and programs. We have proposed some specific content to assist in that effort. **MR**



U.S. soldiers with the 4th Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group secure their jump gear and prepare to board a U.S. Air Force KC-130 Hercules aircraft at the John C. Stennis Space Center in Mississippi, 8 March 2011, during Emerald Warrior 2011.

NOTES

- 1. Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization (New York: Doubleday, 1990).
- 3. David Kolb, Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development (Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1984).
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- 6. For example, K. Aquino and A. Reed, "The Self-importance of Moral Identity," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83(6) (1999): 1423-30; Albert Bandura, "Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities," Personality and Social Psychology Review, (3)3 (1999): 193-209; Albert Bandura, Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); J. Bargh, "Automatic and Conscious Process of Social Information," in R.S. Wyer & T.K. Stull, eds., Handbook of Social Cognition, Vol 3 (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1984), 1-44.
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- 8. Howard Buchner, Dachau: The Hour of the Avenger: An Eyewitness Account (Metairie, Thunderbird Press, Inc., 1986).
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 10. We define self-awareness as habitually and intentionally monitoring one's
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 - 11. Senge.
- 12. Bruce Avolio, Leadership Development in Balance: Made/Born (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005).
- 13. George Casey, "Comprehensive Soldier Fitness: A Vision for Psychological Resilience in the United States Army," in M. Seligman and M. Matthews, eds., American Psychologist (Special Issue on Comprehensive Soldier Fitness), 66(1) (2011): 1-3.
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