



# Teamwork Is Key Part of Discipline

*By 1st Sgt. Jeremy Mastran*

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Now this is the law of the jungle,  
as old and as true as the sky,  
and the wolf that shall keep it may prosper,  
but the wolf that shall break it must die.

As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk,  
the law runneth forward and back; For the strength of  
the pack is the wolf,  
and the strength of the wolf is the pack.

—Rudyard Kipling, 1865-1936  
“The Law for the Wolves”

**T**hese first two verses from the Kipling poem, “The Law for the Wolves,” featured prominently in “The Jungle Book,” epitomize the culture that we have created in my company, the “Wolfpack.” We keep this as our rallying cry and use it to highlight the importance of each Soldier in the team. All Soldiers need something to belong to. They need a sense of purpose

and something positive to rally behind; the “pack” fulfills that need. Each member of the company is taught that he owns his piece of the Wolfpack. There are no expendable Soldiers, nor are there insignificant positions. Each Soldier is vital to the company’s lethality. This culture we have fostered is what has led this company to success.

Company D “Wolfpack”, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division of Fort Riley, Kan., returned from deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in January, 2012. In Afghanistan, the Wolfpack, was split up throughout 10 different locations, performing village stability operations side-by-side with special operations forces. Upon their redeployment, the company command team changed hands in March 2012 and began the task of rebuilding a company that had not worked as a cohesive team in more than 15 months. New Soldiers arriving to the company, combined with the loss of much of the company’s experienced cadre because of regular permanent change of station moves, made the task of team building even harder. Since that time, D

Company has been rebuilt with a strength of 77 Soldiers, NCOs and officers to include the field maintenance team, medic and fire support team attachments.

Since April 2012, this company has experienced zero driving under the influence incidents, zero alcohol-related incidents and zero drug incidents. These accomplishments are in no way, shape, or form the sole responsibility of either the company commander or first sergeant. These are the accomplishments of every individual of the Wolfpack.

This culture was not created overnight and requires energy to maintain. It's cerebrally intense and the results were not instantaneous. Building this culture requires patience and steady forward progress. Every leader in the company must understand the culture and not only adhere to it, but promote it to our junior leaders. The dividends, however, are enduring and create a model of good leadership for our Soldiers to emulate when they become leaders.

The foundation of our culture is trust, discipline, compassion, enthusiasm, morale and genuine care for each other. The Wolfpack's culture starts when each and every Soldier and NCO becomes a part of the pack, I brief them on three very simple rules: Never lie to anyone in the company, never give the company less than your best and never embarrass the company through your actions or inaction.

With these three things we have created a simple, yet effective, basis of understanding for the standards that are expected of each member of the company. We have created a set of societal norms that dictate which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. For those who are not willing to participate as good-standing members of the pack, we work to assist them in overcoming their failings.

For example, we preach to our Soldiers that alcohol is not the centerpiece to a good time. We teach moderation and personal responsibility when drinking. We have taken the universal acceptability of alcohol and deglorified it. The Wolfpack's societal norm for alcohol is that of responsible moderation.

Another example is drug use. We have made drugs taboo in our company. It's not just the illegality of drugs that keeps Soldiers away from them but the social stigma we have attached to it. The company is taught, "In our pack, we don't have room for drug users. If you choose to do drugs, you will have to find another pack, because you are not welcome here." We scrutinize poor behavior that does not positively reflect the true character of a professional Soldier.

We strive very hard to foster trust in the Wolfpack. This is of utmost importance in our line of work and harkens back to the first rule. When we say we are going to do something, we follow through. The Soldiers of the pack know their leadership will always look out for them and will fall on their own swords for them if necessary. We don't pacify with empty promises, nor do we make empty threats.

Word travels fast in the ranks. Soldiers see very quickly that their leaders care enough to follow through on their word. They also see when their leaders fail them at that same task.

We make it a point to never fail. We trust our Soldiers. We trust them to do the right thing when the chips are down. Everyone's life depends on this. This belief that our Soldiers are mature adds to their empowerment and to that of our junior leaders. Just as we strive to earn their trust, they strive to earn ours.

Discipline is the bedrock upon which our culture is built. It's more than doing the right thing. It's looking and acting like a professional Soldier just for the sake of being professional. We applaud and glorify discipline in the Wolfpack. Sgt. 1st Class Todd Cornell, the platoon sergeant, for 1st platoon, said it best: "They can take away our money for training. They can take away our tanks. But they can never take away our discipline."

We do the things no one else wants to because they are inconvenient at times. We march as a company when it would be easier to move as a gaggle. We practice whatever task we are given when it would be easier to "shoot from the hip," because practice is where excellence comes from. We fight for that extra exercise iteration when it would be easier to sit down and relax. That's what makes us lethal. We never quit and never allow someone to look at us with disdain because of a lack of discipline. Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew McCready, battalion's command sergeant major, once said when he took over as the battalion's senior enlisted advisor, "Iron Rangers (1-16th Infantry's nickname) are the quiet professionals."

We have tried to take his word to heart.

We may be loud and somewhat arrogant amongst our peers, but we strive to be the "quiet professionals" that win graciously, yet always take their licks with a smile. We don't yell and scream to maintain discipline. We work with temperance to correct Soldiers. We use the Uniform Code of Military Justice as a tool of last resort when other means of corrective training have failed. We do not use UCMJ actions as a threat to be swung around like a cudgel at the first sign of a problem. We do not allow the UCMJ to become a substitute for real leadership.

Compassion is something very important to our culture. Compassion for a Soldier doesn't necessarily mean coddling him or her. I believe that one of things some leaders fail at is remembering where they came from. We didn't all start our careers in the Army at our current rank. We made the same, often stupid, choices that our Soldiers make today as the Soldiers we once were. We just learned from those mistakes. We praise in public, chastise in private. A stern word spoken directly to a Soldier in private will get better results than humiliation or an iron fist.

Morale, I think, is sometimes more often used as a convenient buzzword than to represent the tangible thing that it is. The Wolfpack maintains a very high state

of morale. Much of it comes from the “pride in ownership” and the “buy-in principle” addressed earlier, but some of it comes from enthusiasm built by the leadership. Motivation is contagious. If the leadership is motivated and can get the junior leaders excited about being a part of the pack, it tends to spread like wildfire amongst the Soldiers. I specifically time my “pep-rally speeches” to the company to take place when the pack may have been beaten down a bit, are tired and in need of some encouragement. I use our triumphs to praise and build the team through my own enthusiasm.

Above all else, our leaders show genuine concern and care for their Soldiers—not just in thought, but true care in deed. We must be interested in their lives; be interested in their futures; be interested in their hopes, dreams and fears. Real leaders don’t fake it. Soldiers can tell very quickly if a leader is just faking it with them. If NCOs take care of their Soldiers, I promise, those Soldiers will take care of their NCOs.

None of our Soldiers who may have come to the unit with issues or have developed issues are thrown away or pushed off on other units to train. They are worked with and rehabilitated so that they become productive members of the pack again. We have a proven track record. Our

Soldiers do not need to attend battalion-or brigade-level remedial physical fitness training; we work with them and help them meet the standard at the company level. If a Soldier is deeply in debt, we work to assist them in building a budget and working down that debt; we don’t send them off to another unit to be someone else’s problem. They are part of the pack and we will always take care of our own. We treat our Soldiers as we would our own kids. All of these kids’ moms and dads and the U.S. Army entrusted these Soldiers into our care. This is a responsibility that we do not take lightly. How would we want our own kids treated by their leaders if the roles were reversed?

No one is immune to the three core tenets of the pack; this is what will ensure the lasting legacy that the Wolfpack has created. All Soldiers of the pack, regardless of rank, are bound by them. We share the burden of soldiering equally. The leadership of the company holds themselves to the same standards that we hold our Soldiers. We share in our Soldiers’ hardships and show them “what right looks like.” It is imperative that the correct example be set without exception. I often ask myself, “What type of leaders do we want leading us?”

We are those leaders. This is how we have become successful. ■

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