



Soldiers with the 3rd Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division, Resolute Support Sustainment Brigade compete in a tug-of-war competition during Marne Week's organizational day, Nov. 16, 2017 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. The event was part of Marne Week, a time for 3rd Infantry Division Soldiers to compete in team sports and recreational group activities while honoring the division's service to the nation. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Elizabeth White, 3rd Infantry Division)

Team Building and Unit Cohesion

By Command Sgt. Maj. Sam Young

United States Army Field Artillery School

Published in From One Leader to Another Volume I by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in 2013

From birth in 1775 to the present, our Army has evolved into the most dominant force on the planet, capable of fighting and winning in all environments. One of the key attributes of this success is the ability of leaders to build teams and form cohesive units. Our first commander in chief said it best, in a letter to Henry Knox, "My first wish would be that my military family, and the whole Army, should consider themselves as a band of brothers, willing and ready to die for each other (Washington, 1798)." During the American Revolution, untrained men would travel across the country to fight against the massive, well trained, and equipped British Army. Resources were scarce and death seemed imminent. With the influence of great leadership, the

colonists were able to bond together, form a cohesive unit, and fight for the independence of our great nation. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of team building and unit cohesion and provide a few thoughts on leadership styles and their utility.

ADRP 6-22, states that teams are developed in three separate phases. The first developmental stage is the "formation" stage which involves the reception and integration of Soldiers to the unit. During this stage, the flow of communication is essential for the success of the section. The leader sets clear guidance and tells the section what he/she expects from each individual Soldier. It is also vital that the Soldier feels a level of acceptance from his/her team members. The military

is a “melting pot” of different ideas and personalities. Therefore as a leader, during this stage, you need to get to know your Soldiers. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each team member is an essential element to success in combat.

The next stage is the “enrichment” stage, where the Soldier begins to trust his/her leaders, peers and subordinates. Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. Raymond Odierno explains, “Trust is the bedrock of our honored profession -- trust between each other, trust between Soldiers and leaders, trust between Soldiers and their families and the Army, and trust with the American people” (2012). The question arises, “How do we get Soldiers to trust their leaders, peers, and subordinates?” The answer is through the implementation of an effective leadership style.

Leadership is the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization (ADP 6-22). Across the Army, there are several styles of leadership, which are characterized by individual traits and behaviors. Some examples of leadership styles include authoritarian, charismatic, and transformational. It is hard to determine which leadership style is the best, since not all goals are the same. Depending on the situation, one style may prove more effective than another.

The authoritarian leadership style is defined as one who will rarely give subordinates the opportunity to make any suggestions, even if they benefit the organization. This type of leadership works best when a quick decision needs to be made, without the consultation of a group.

However, this can be perceived as problematic when it comes to building trust within a unit. The result of this leadership style can and often will be an unsatisfactory command climate and loss of cohesion within a unit.

A charismatic style of leadership is characterized by an individual’s ability to inspire others within an organization. Subordinates are drawn to the personality and charm of this leader. Leaders who fall into this style will try to get their teams to set themselves apart from the mass of an organization. Although good for team building the downfall of this style occurs when too much emphasis is placed on the abilities of the leader. If the leader were to leave the organization, then there may be a loss of morale within the unit or team. Similar to a charismatic style is a transformational leadership style. This style is characterized by a leader’s ability to motivate, while educating subordinates on their specific roles within the organization. He/she will challenge subordinates to create innovative ways to develop their own style of leadership. Both styles of leadership are proven for building trust.

Once the team is built and trust is established, Soldiers will begin to use words like “we,” rather than “I.” Soldiers want to be part of a team, they want to belong, and they need to be proud of who they are and what they do. Unit pride is contagious and leaders should be proud of their unit and find ways to spotlight individual, team, and unit accomplishments. Develop team building events and establish a unit level competition. Ensure you support intramural sports and get the entire unit involved. Whether they are participating or

cheering, it is a unit team. Design a unit t-shirt that everyone will wear with pride during unit runs, sporting events, organizational days, etc. Take every opportunity to get your Soldiers’ families involved in unit activities. These are just some examples of how to build trust, teamwork, and pride in a unit.

The final stage of team building is the “sustainment” stage. In this stage, the team has come together, and a sense of pride is spread throughout. The leader has effectively brought together a group of individuals who are now prepared to face the challenges of war. After



U.S. Army paratroopers assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade sling-load an Army Ground Mobility Vehicle (AGMV) to a CH-47 Chinook helicopter during Exercise Saber Junction 2019 at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, Sept. 15, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Henry Villarama)

each section has reached the final stage of the team building process it is time to bring the unit together as a whole. While bringing individual sections together, the flow of information is essential. Leaders should share the knowledge they have gained from previous operational assignments, which will ensure that “we”, as a combat force continue to evolve. When this same process is done over and over, on a slightly larger scale, the result is unit cohesion. Members of a cohesive unit have a strong bond to each other, as well as the mission.

Throughout my years in the Army, I have come across several units that could be defined as “cohesive,” but only once have I actually witnessed the transformation process. Before going to this unit I had heard rumors about the lack of morale and discipline in the unit from both military and civilian personnel from across the installation. The unit was said to be the worst company sized element in the formation. We had just reorganized and were preparing to deploy. During the next several months we had to build a team and train hard, but also afford these Soldiers time to enjoy being with their families. After meeting with the unit leaders, we arrived at a plan that each of us were confident would work. By using the examples I explained in this paper we focused on building a cohesive team. Suddenly, there was a different dynamic throughout the organization. Soldiers who once argued with each other and had no unit pride were now forming tight



A Soldier with the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, shows his son the inside of an armored vehicle during 1st Armored Division's Family Day, Aug. 24, 2018. The Bulldogs had games for the children along with static displays of armored vehicles. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Felicia Jagdatt)

knit teams. The leaders knew the family members of all the Soldiers in the formation. Spouses were baking cookies, not for her husband's “co-workers”, but for his brothers in arms. Going to Iraq we were a family, we trained hard, bonded together, and were ready to do what we do best, fight and win our nation's wars. Throughout many hardships during a 15-month deployment we remained a cohesive unit and were successful.

If you would like to learn more about this topic, please read the references provided throughout this paper; *Army Doctrine & Army Doctrine Reference Publications 6-22, Army Leadership*, “Letter to Henry Knox” written by President George Washington, and “Expectations for the Future” written by Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. Raymond Odierno. ■

NCO JOURNAL

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

