



(U.S. Army photo by Capt. Ashley Bainsangster taken Oct. 6, 2019) A U.S. Army squad leader with 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, directs his paratroopers during urban-assault training as part of Arctic Anvil 2019 at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, Oct. 6, 2019.

The Relationship between Leadership and Stability

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Leadership and stability are important characteristics that can, at times, exist independently of each other. Some leaders possess strong leadership qualities but lack consistency in their decisions. Instability causes a breakdown of trust within a unit, but stable leaders can improve unit confidence and poise under pressure. This article will address four areas leaders can improve to produce long-term trust and confidence in their subordinates, peers, and superiors.

Preventing an Excuse Culture

Soldiers can only perform what, and how, they've previously been taught. Some Soldiers get exposed to disruptive behaviors in their lives and careers and use that as an excuse for their misbehaviors. This allows them to create limitations for themselves. According to Joseph

Mroz and Joseph Allen (2019), "An excuse influences what the victim perceives to be the cause for an event, and, if successful, results in a judgment of non-responsibility" (para. 8). But the opposite is also true.

In Jocko Willink's book *Extreme Ownership*, the instructors conducted an experiment. During "Hell Week," one boat crew kept repeatedly winning, and one kept finishing in last place. They decided to switch the boat crew leaders to see what would happen and the formerly last place boat crew started winning every competition and the previous first place crew fell behind. They determined it was because one leader focused on blame and negativity while the successful leader focused on positivity and teamwork (Willink & Babin, 2015). Leaders should be role models for subordinates and set high standards and expectations for the entire unit that everyone should try to achieve. If the team fails to

achieve them, reflect on what happened, readjust accordingly, and try again. Do not accept subpar performances from the team or from the leader. Effort, not excuses.

Experience vs Talent

In 2019, the Army implemented a new promotion concept known as *Talent Management*. Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) will now be promoted based on *talent/merit* rather than time in grade or service (Tan, 2019). This transformation begs the question whether talent trumps experience or not. Can a young “talented” NCO coach a Soldier through the complicated processes of divorce, financial hardship, promotional proceedings, or combat operations through their talent or experience? Although talent is highly regarded and respected, experience still has a profound effect on organizational goals, Soldier development, and stability. Great leadership is not just who has the most badges, but a combination of talent and experience together.

Avoid Becoming a Toxic Leader

The term “toxic leadership” is a label for counterproductive behaviors that infringe on Army values, which can debilitate an entire unit.

☞ *The term toxic has been used when describing leaders who have engaged in what the Army now refers to as counterproductive leadership behaviors. Counterproductive leadership is incompatible with Army leadership doctrine and Army Values. It often violates regulations and can impede mission accomplishment. (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 8-7) ☞*

No Soldier joins the U.S. Army dreaming of becoming a toxic leader. To help illustrate how toxic leadership works, imagine a staff sergeant serving in a squad leader position. Issues at home and difficulties at work are stressing them out. Furthermore, they failed to make the promotion list for the third time in a row. A subordinate, who has been in the Army for a total of six months, is attempting to conduct maintenance on an Army vehicle. Confused and inexperienced, the Soldier asks the staff sergeant for help on how to check fluid levels. Without warning, the staff sergeant yells at the Soldier and insults them. Because of that incident, the Soldier will most likely never ask for their help again. There is also a danger that subordinates exposed to this style of leadership will adopt it as they progress through the ranks, negatively affecting the next generation of Soldiers (Willard, 2017). It is through positive leadership that today’s NCOs should affect their subordinates and create future compassionate leaders.



(U.S. Army photo by Spc. Beverly Roche taken Feb. 4, 2020) A U.S. Army mortar team leader with 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), observes his team fire an M244 Lightweight Mortar during a live-fire exercise at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Feb. 4, 2020.

Adapting to the Future

Some of the behaviors considered acceptable or appropriate in the Army of the past are no longer conducive to the Army of the future. Holding on to outdated traditions, not because they are working but because they are familiar, is not progressing the Army forward. One example of this is the new Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT). The old Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) had been around since the 1980s, and with only three events, only one of which was applicable in combat (the two-mile run), it wasn’t a true reflection of the movements necessary in combat. The Army could have easily kept the APFT in place because it was tradition, and because there was already an established system in place, but it chose to prepare for the future fight and develop the new six-event ACFT that better reflected a Soldier’s combat/lethality potential (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2019). This push for change came from the most senior leaders of the Army and is a positive example for future leaders to be innovative and progressive.

Conclusion

Maturity, integrity, and a servant leadership philosophy form a foundation for stable leadership. The Army provides a plethora of resident and distant learning curriculum to reinforce leader development, but mental and moral qualities are distinctive to the individual. NCOs that are consistent in their leadership decisions provide subordinates with purpose, direction, and motivation. Difficulties and setbacks in life happen to every Soldier, but leaders who model stability provide positive examples for Soldiers to consistently learn and grow in character. ■

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