



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders
From: Company Commanders

Have You Witnessed Leadership?

Leadership counts. It is the heart of our profession, so it is important that we take time to pause, reflect and tell the stories that are forging our understanding of what it means to lead.

What does leadership look like in action? Company

commanders recently gathered to answer this question—to share concrete examples of real-life leadership. If you are like us, reading this article will call to mind your own stories, and it will evoke in you a desire to lead in a way that is worthy of a story yet to be told.

Charles Cline Jr.

420th EN

In 1991, a young Soldier stepped off a plane in the dark of night. He turned in his weapon, got his footlocker and sat down in a hangar. He had no access to money, very little cash in his pocket, no vehicle and no place to stay (the barracks were full, and his wife had not come back to Georgia, even though she had known when he was getting home). After watching all the families reunite and leave, he sat, quietly wondering what to do. After sitting awhile, he heard a noise and looked up. Around the corner came his platoon sergeant [PSG], who muttered, “I had a feeling this would happen.” The PSG took the Soldier to his house and put him to bed. The next morning, he gave the Soldier a vehicle to use, keys to his house, \$50 in cash and a directive that the Soldier could get his life together after he ate the breakfast that the PSG’s wife was cooking. The PSG is now a command sergeant major, and the young Soldier is me, now about to pin on captain bars. Thanks, CSM Hartless, for an excellent example of leadership in action.

Rob Stanton

C/1-32 IN

When I was 10, my dad was transferred from Connecticut to Florida to be a regional manager. This was a great step up in a company known for “hiring for life.” My sister and I were happy, my mom was thrilled and my dad was living the corporate dream. One day, after eight months on the job, my dad came home suddenly at lunchtime. He usually worked long hours, so this didn’t make sense. He sat quietly at the kitchen table with my mom and then broke the news. He didn’t have a job. He had arrived at work that morning to find his staff packing. He asked his secretary what she was doing, and she said, “Bob, I and the rest of the team have been laid off.” Shocked, my dad

got on the phone with the corporate office and found out that there had been some “restructuring” due to new corporate management. But, they told him, he didn’t have to worry; all of the regional managers were safe. My father argued, but it became obvious that the upper leadership had made their decision and that they weren’t interested in what he had to say. So, right then and there in the middle of the conversation with his boss, he quit. He packed up his desk and came home. He refused to work for a company that would do what they did; loyalty had to go both ways.

Ari Martyn

B/1-68 AR

On the day I graduated from Ranger School, CPT Dirk Ringgenberg, the commander of the company to which I would be assigned upon arrival at the 173rd [Airborne Brigade], emailed me to congratulate me, give me some basic advice about PCSing [permanent change of station] and provide his contact information. Then, the next week when I

Leadership in Action, Redux

The Army’s theme for 1985 was Leadership. To emphasize the theme, the Army asked every major command to submit stories about Soldiers leading. The product that emerged from that process, a collection of leadership examples, was published as Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-66-85 *Leadership in Action* (LIA). We had no idea that it existed—that is, until we were writing this article and did a search for “leadership in action.” It is inspiring to know that telling the stories that forge our understanding of what it means to lead is a practice ingrained in our profession, whether in the 1980s or the 2010s.

*Left to right:
MSG Faustino
Martinez, SGT
Austin Storms,
MAJ Dirk
Ringgenberg and
CPT Ari Martyn
after a successful
operation in
Afghanistan. MAJ
Ringgenberg per-
sonally welcomed
CPT Martyn to
the 173rd Air-
borne Brigade.*



arrived at the Venice [Italy] Airport at 0600 hours, when all of the other Soldiers (from E-2 to O-4) were loading up the staff-duty van for the 45-minute drive back to Caserma Ederle, CPT Ringgenberg and his wife, Michelle, met me at the airport and drove me back themselves. They made sure I got breakfast, helped me get checked into temporary lodging (they had made the reservations for me!), gave me a quick tour of the post, brought me over to the company, and then linked me up with the senior platoon leader, who was waiting for me and had already made plans to in-process me into post and the unit. Keep in mind that this was five weeks before we deployed; everyone's time at this point was extremely valuable. The company's deliberate plan for receiving and integrating me made me feel like a valued member of the team. What a great way to arrive at your first unit!

Tim H.

When I was a platoon leader, I figured out that my commander was not following the regulatory guidance with regard to shipment of personal effects [PE] of noncombat related medically evacuated Soldiers out of theater. Watching my commander buck the regulation completely baffled me; I mean, how can you blatantly disregard a regulation? I asked the commander to "develop me" on his decision-making process because someday I would be sitting in his chair. I was really looking for an opportunity to push back on him; instead, my eyes were opened, and my view of leadership changed. He explained that leaders accomplish the mission and take care of Soldiers. These particular Soldiers, ambulatory able to work, needed their gear immediately. If we followed the guidance, they could be a month or longer without their stuff—unacceptable in his eyes. So we augmented the process a bit. We would inventory all items, seal the boxes and ship normally. We accounted for the PE, yet also took care of the Soldier. Taking care of Soldiers and accomplishing the mission sometimes requires leaders to make a judgment call and to not blindly follow every regulation.

Christopher LaForest HHC/27th BCT

I remember my college swim team. We were supposed to start practice daily at 2:30 sharp, but, typical for swimmers, we usually sat on the edge of the pool with our feet in the water thinking about how cold it was going to be. One day, Chris Vaughn joined the team. When the clock struck 2:30, this guy dove into the water. He did that every day. After practice, he would stretch for 15 minutes. He did *that* every day, just like everyone was *supposed* to do. He almost never spoke, but he always did the right thing. And he just kept getting faster. Eventually, whether from guilt or because we wanted to be as fast as Chris, we started doing what he did. The team started practice on time. The team stretched after practice. I may have talked with Chris a total of 10 times in the four years I knew him. He was just a really quiet, fast guy.

Heath Brown 1-167 IN

During Ranger School, I had a problem with a tooth. At the dentist's office, the O-6 dentist made some remarks alluding to me being in the National Guard and using up active duty funds rather than taking care of the dental work on my own bill. After I explained my predicament, I was sent away without having the needed work done to my tooth. When I reported back to my senior TAC [tactical officer] at Ranger School, he came unglued. He marched right down to see the dentist and sternly explained that I needed treatment. His actions could have been construed as borderline disrespectful. Another dentist quickly saw me and treated the tooth. Although I was just a "roster number" student, my TAC treated me like a valuable person. I will never forget SFC Dodd.

Jared Nichols C/1-12 CAV

After returning from deployment, our company went to 50 percent strength. Instead of receiving E-4/E-5s to replace



Behind CPT Jared Nichols, his gunner rests on top of the turret after 24 hours of gunnery. In training, the sergeant ran crew drills with new, untrained privates until their performance was “almost flawless.”

those lost, we were filled with brand-new privates straight out of Initial Entry Training. Two or three out of four members of every tank crew were brand new and had never fired tank gunnery. On our first practice run during tank qualification, my new loader took a round out of the ready rack and, while attempting to put it in the tube, hit me in the face with the round. In the next engagement, he dropped the round in the turret. After the run, my gunner, SGT Rivera, got out of the tank, pulled out both of the privates (loader and driver) and proceeded to unleash on them not just for the incident with the rounds, but also all their other miscues (stopping short in the tank, hitting the brakes too hard, not calling out crew station commands). After SGT Rivera calmed down, he looked at me and said, “Sir, I got this. This is my fault—they didn’t execute. I don’t care how new they are.” He and the privates ran crew drills into the night. The next day during qualification, the crew scored a 924 out of 1,000 points, an almost flawless performance. Those two Soldiers, PVT Knapp and PVT Hosler, are now NCOs and gunners, and both make sure their respective crews are well-oiled machines.

JoeAnn Berry
36th MEB

As a new 2LT, I and about six other 2LTs in my battalion (at the time, 61st Area Support Medical Battalion, now 61st Multifunctional Medical Battalion) were ordered to our first of what became a monthly session of PT and breakfast with our battalion commander, LTC William Grimes. We ran, ran, ... oh, and ran some more. During these monthly sessions, LTC Grimes discussed everything from mainte-

nance to the importance of stretching to OIF [Operation Iraqi Freedom]. And he never let anyone dodge the discussion. Although I did not realize it at the time, we were a special group of officers. Why? Because we were being mentored by our senior rater on a regular basis. This is leadership—taking the time to be with the people who are

Dave Gohlich

I CO & HHC/3/2 SCR

In late summer and early fall of 2007, we were fighting through an insurgent stronghold in southern Baghdad. Each day was more of the same: firefights, IEDs [improvised explosive devices] and temperatures well above 100 degrees. We lost a number of great Soldiers KIA [killed in



CPT Dave Gohlich, left, and LTC Rod Coffee talk after a “peace meeting” between Sunni and Shia religious groups in Barwana, Diyala Province, Iraq. The battalion commander led from the front, and CPT Gohlich says his “personal example set the tone for our entire 15-month deployment.”

How to Run a LIA Workshop with Your Team

Recently, a group of us spent the evening talking about leadership. We told one-minute “leadership in action” stories to each other. Picture 25 leaders in small groups, three to four per table, telling stories about experiences that affected them and that stand out as examples of leaders leading. Katie Christy worked the clock. After we were done at that first table, we each rotated to a different table and Katie started the clock again. We told our story to fresh faces and listened to several new stories. We did three rounds of this, sharing our stories three times and listening to at least nine energizing and inspiring stories. We came away from the experience fired up and plugged back into what we value most in a leader.

This can work as an icebreaker for new groups or as an energizing experience for those who have been together for a long time. In addition to learning about lead-

ership, participants practice the art of storytelling and the art of engaged listening. As facilitators, we like to interrupt the workshop after round 1 to talk specifically about how to be an engaged listener.

After round 3, we asked everyone to stand up and said: “Each of us is now going to put a hand on the shoulder of one person whose story really connected with us.” Picture the chaos. I have my hand on your shoulder, and you have to pull me across the room in order to get your hand on someone else’s shoulder. (Big thanks to Nancy Dixon, who shared this shoulder-touching idea with us.) Once everyone had a hand on one person’s shoulder, some participants had many hands on them. We finished the workshop by asking those participants to share their stories one more time, this time with the entire group.

action] and WIA [wounded in action] in the fighting early on in the deployment. LTC Rod Coffee, our battalion commander, was out front each and every day: dirty, sweaty, getting shot at, just like the rest of us. He was always visible to the Soldiers, especially when the bullets started flying, and was always sharing in their hardships. He ate last, slept last and never worried about his personal comfort or safety before his Soldiers were taken care of. This went a long way to inspire the Soldiers. No one could complain when the Colonel was out there every day fighting right next to you. The Soldiers loved him for it and followed his every order without hesitation. His personal courage was contagious, and his personal example set the tone for our entire 15-month deployment.

Kelly Jones

C/91st CAB (A)

When I was an E-4 and had just arrived at my first duty station, we were doing EIB [expert infantryman badge] train-up. My company commander, whom I had barely met, did the entire day-land navigation course with me. During the course, I got to know CPT Patrick Frank (now commanding 3rd BCT, 10th Mountain Div.), and he learned about me and my family. As

we all know, time is a precious commodity for a company commander. My commander invested that time in me, and I never forgot it. That personal touch with Soldiers is priceless, an example I seek to emulate.

Brian Hancock

HHC/7 POG

For the first time since I came to KAF [Kandahar Airfield], the room fell completely silent as everyone strained to hear CPT Chris Strelluf on the radio. His psychological operations [PSYOP] Soldiers had been supporting an infantry company clearing a village of suspected insurgents. The infantry commander needed more PSYOP capacity for crowd control, so CPT Strelluf, the commander of all PSYOP in that area of operations, personally strapped a set of loud-

Brian Hancock (not pictured) recalls that CPT Chris Strelluf, right, a psychological operations (PSYOP) commander in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, “created an additional PSYOP element consisting only of himself” and then survived when an improvised explosive device detonated as the mission was ending.





CPT Patrick (PJ) Snyder (not pictured) remembers that SFC Angel Aponte, left, was able to turn around a troubled young soldier in his platoon because he understands “that our mission is not just winning wars, but building better citizens.”

speakers to his back and created an additional PYSOP element consisting only of himself. He advanced with the infantry scouting unit, and he successfully calmed the local populace. As the mission was nearing completion, the low-battery warning siren sounded on the scout’s portable jamming equipment—it was failing. Seconds later, a massive IED that had been buried in the ground not 30 meters from CPT Strelluf exploded. The concussive blast knocked him to the ground. Had there not been a solid wall between him and the explosion, he would not have made it. Eerily, the blast crater was centered on an intersection that he and the infantry Soldiers had walked across numerous times. How many of their nine lives did these Soldiers have left?

Jason Dupuis

D/3-7 IN

When I was a Ranger private, I remember buffing the halls on the first floor of the barracks by the CO’s office. He always stood, never sat, as he worked. I began to wonder, “Why this odd behavior?” Later I found out that CPT Gilland had broken his back on a jump. He took a chance and got the surgery and went right back to work. He jumped again three months later. He was harder than woodpecker lips. Although it has been many years, I continue to draw on his example for inspiration when the going gets tough and I need to rise to the occasion. I know from experience that Soldiers will follow a CPT Gilland to hell and back.

Patrick (PJ) Snyder

E/5-52 ADA

We had a Soldier get caught smoking Spice [synthetic cannabis] in the barracks parking lot. Before his UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] hearing, he went AWOL. We found out that he had been living on the streets of Los Angeles. He’s barely 18, a kid really, who grew up in an orphanage and never had any real family, role models, advantages,

etc. His PSG, SFC Angel Aponte (who looks about as mean as they come, big and intimidating with shrapnel in his face from early OIF), worked with this Soldier day and night, and aggressively pleaded his case to me and the 1SG. While the Soldier was on 45 days of extra duty and restriction, his PSG brought him Thanksgiving chow from home and had him to his house at Christmas. The Soldier really turned a

corner, and when it came time to recommend separation or retention, we all recommended retaining him. Last week, I promoted the young Soldier, and I signed an impact award for him today. None of this would have been possible without the involved leadership of this one sergeant first class who understood that our mission is not just winning wars, but building better citizens.

Leadership truly is at the heart of our profession and at the heart of the CompanyCommand (<http://CC.army.mil>) and PlatoonLeader (<http://PL.army.mil>) professional forums. If you have a story to share, please join your forum and get involved! And today, lead in a way that is worthy of a story yet to be told.

