



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders
From: Company Commanders

Who Influenced You to Stay in the Army?

We know that local leadership is a key factor influencing captains to stay in or get out, but what is it about those good leaders that creates the conditions for their Soldiers to choose to stay in? In the CompanyCommand forum, we recently asked: "As you reflect on why you decided to stay in the Army, do you have a story to share?"

Was there a particular leader who influenced your decision to stay in?"

In thinking about the factors and people that influenced us to stay in, we also look inward and begin to ask ourselves, "Am I like this? What can I do to more positively influence the Soldiers whose lives I touch?"

Ryan Kranc

Quickstrike Troop, 4/3 ACR; Lightning Troop, 2/16 CAV

I have been fortunate to be led by dynamic, engaging and concerned leaders throughout my career. Still, about halfway through my command I was drained and filled out the paperwork to end my time in service. On Veterans Day 2005 I met with my regimental commander in Iraq to discuss my intent of leaving the Army. We were located in a

volatile area of Iraq, and I knew he was extremely busy, so I especially appreciated that he took the time to talk to me about my intentions and future plans. After talking for about 20 minutes about the pros and cons of departing service, one of the troops in our regiment was attacked by insurgents, who killed one of our troopers and injured two others. I knew all three men. In that very moment, something clicked for me. I recognized in a new way why it is we



Quickstrike Troop in the Al Jazeera Desert of Northwestern Iraq, circa 2005. Says Ryan Kranc, "We serve for those who are willing to lay down their lives for those fundamental and inalienable rights that distinguish our country from all others."

BG Peter Bayer (foreground), the Multi-National Corps-Iraq chief of staff, talks to soldiers during an end-of-tour award ceremony at Camp Victory's Al Faw Palace in Baghdad.



serve—for those men and women who serve with us, guided by a common set of principles and towards a common objective. We serve for those who are willing to lay down their lives for those fundamental and inalienable rights that distinguish our country from all others.

I guess the circumstances and a caring regimental commander all came to bear that morning to demonstrate that point to me. I tore the paperwork up on the spot. I have not looked back since.

Emily LaCaille

HHC/84th EN

Flat out, my platoon sergeant in Iraq told me to stay in because the Army needs better officers. I talked to him a few weeks ago after he redeployed as a first sergeant from Afghanistan, and I once again shared my thoughts about potentially getting out. Just as he did after my platoon leader time, he gave me a dose of “Soldiers want officers that give a damn to stay in.” I’m listening to him—again.

William Frobe

HHD/516th PSB

I was coming off two bad bosses in a row—one was abusive, the other had no focus. I printed my letter of resignation, but thanks to the counsel of a great officer—MAJ Michael Masley—I decided to PCS and give the Army one more chance for a good experience. When I arrived at the National Training Center’s 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment in July 2004, I fell under then-COL Peter Bayer. When we received the FRAGO [fragmentary order] to transition from an OPFOR-centric [opposing force] universe to a deployment-minded unit, we did it methodically and with purpose. COL Bayer had the right focus. He didn’t get overly excited about every little detail as long as the larger mission was accomplished. He was intelligent and gave us direction and distance, and he let us achieve the results. I stayed in the Army because of this experience, and I developed as a leader. Today I strive to be more like [now] BG Bayer and less like the bad leaders who drove me close to resigning my commission.

Mary Luciani Brownlee

F/1-18 IN

When I was a platoon leader, my company commander got an Article 15, was relieved and got booted out of the

Army. The Article 15 included maltreatment of a subordinate. Yes, I was the subordinate. Luckily, I experienced quality leaders as well. One particular battalion commander used to say, “I will never apologize for taking care of Soldiers.” He brought a lot of passion to the unit. He shared his emotions, his love of the battalion, with us openly. It was not like crying on motor pool Monday formations, but more like impassioned motivational talks and such, *en masse*, whether it was for something awesome we as a group had done, or not so good, like two DUIs [driving under the influence] during one weekend. He was really the first leader to hold me to a fair standard. He was a straight talker, a leader who didn’t mince words but who also wasn’t a jerk for the sheer power trip. He walked that balance well. So here I am, putting into action what I learned from the bad examples and seeking to emulate what I am learning from the good examples.

Steven Dukes

HHC 63rd ESB

As I look back at my most influential leaders and mentors, one resounding characteristic is dominant in all of them: simple caring. They took the time to get to know me on both a professional level and a personal level. What I value the most about the Army is that we are a family and support each other. If I have a personal or professional problem, I have leaders who take a personal interest in resolving or caring about my situation. I really appreciate that I am not just another face in some corporate crowd. All too often, we find ourselves behind the desk feeding the beast (higher headquarters information requirements, etc.), but we also need to troop the line and talk and listen to Soldiers. Ten minutes of the commander’s time about how a Soldier’s family is doing is worth more than its weight in gold. I have been amazed at the issues wearing down my Soldiers, and they often just need a leader to lend them an ear—someone to genuinely listen to them and understand their particular situation.

Brittany Meeks

178th MP Detachment

After a 15-month deployment—this one as a staff officer—I was burned out. I was also frustrated with some things I'd seen during the deployment, and I decided it was time for me to go. My paperwork to leave was approved.

But then I was invited to West Point to talk to cadets about my two combat tours. The trip was a breath of fresh air. From the moment I landed and began talking to peers and mentors—and when I saw the eager eyes of the cadets—I began to reassess my feelings and my future. I didn't hate the Army; I was just tired and frustrated, and the things that frustrated me about the Army weren't going to get any better if those who cared left. Running away from the frustration wasn't going to fix anything. I also felt a growing sense of desire and responsibility to give back.

I don't see myself as an amazing officer, but I did have leaders who believed in me, and they had clearly left the door open for me to change my mind. During those three short days at West Point, I decided to answer the question the Military Police commandant had asked me: "What could the Army do to keep me?" If I were to stay, there was something I wanted to do: command a law-enforcement unit. To be effective in the long term, I felt I needed to widen my knowledge of my branch, and, to that point, I had only seen the combat side of the MP Corps. So I told my very approachable brigade commander, and, with no hesitation, he offered me command of the 178th MP Detachment at Fort Hood [Texas], one of the largest MP detachments in the Army.

I had an exceptional experience in command, learning more about leadership than I could have possibly imagined, the MP Corps and what the perfect senior NCO should be (thanks 1SG Ibrom!). The Army is part of who I am to the core. I love Soldiers. I love my MPs. And I am glad I struggled with whether to stay or go because it solidified my commitment. I'm grateful to those who invited me to speak at West Point, where I reconnected with the reasons I joined in the first place, and I deeply appreciate the many leaders who genuinely encouraged me—without pressuring me—to stay. Their patience to let me struggle and

then put one foot out the door, and then immediately offer me the opportunity to command some of the finest MPs in the Army, exactly as I had asked, was beyond what they had to do.

Jonathan Hamilton

E Co., 1-171 AVN

When I was a young lieutenant my first experience on active duty was not a positive one, and I considered leaving the military when my commitment was up. After a change of command, our new commander sat his lieutenants down and gave us all an initial counseling, specifically laying out his expectations. On a quarterly basis, he sat us down and gave us feedback. He let us know how we were doing and how he thought we could improve. While this doesn't sound earth shattering, we all know it doesn't happen regularly—as it's supposed to. What impressed me the most about him was how concerned he was with developing his leaders—not just for the sake of his company but also for the companies that they would someday command. I am in command now, and I continue to use his model when counseling my young lieutenants. I will always appreciate his mentorship and guidance.

Will Mangini

A/3-10 IN

I had several bosses in a row that were very toxic leaders. They did not take the time to get to know me and did not invest any time in mentoring me or even encouraging me to stay in the Army. They expected me to fit the mold that was their ideal from when they were junior leaders. They were completely obsessed with the mission details, were micromanagers and were not open-minded. As a result, I had a very bad taste in my mouth after my first cou-

MAJ Brittany Meeks recites the oath of office after her promotion at Liberty Station in Point Loma, Calif., the same place her grandfather went through Navy boot camp in the 1940s.



The State of Army Leadership

In April, the Center for Army Leadership published its most recent report on the state of leadership in the Army. One key finding is that “Develops Others” continues to be our lowest-rated core competency as leaders. Only 58 percent of company-grade officers rate their immediate supervisor as effective at leader development, and 46 percent of leaders—an all-time low—report that their unit places a high/very high priority on leader development (compared to 53 percent in 2009 and 55 percent in 2008).

Additional Highlights

- Active duty captains showed the greatest level of indecision about staying in the military beyond their current obligation (42 percent).
- In 2010, the smallest percentage of captains since

2005 (11 percent) report they probably or definitely plan to leave the Army upon completion of their current obligation.

- 44 percent of company-grade leaders identified serving in a command or higher leadership position as their immediate career goal.
- 83 percent of Army leaders report observing a leader who demonstrates toxic leadership behavior in the past year.
- Almost all (97 percent) observed an extraordinary leader in the past year.

One Takeaway: Seek to be the extraordinary leader. Develop your subordinates. If you don’t take the time, junior officers won’t give more of theirs. Leadership counts!

ple of years and ended up getting out of the Army. With some time away and some perspective, I realized it wasn’t the Army I disliked; it was those leaders. I am very happy to be back in the Army, and I am also happy to report that I am finding intelligent leaders who display common sense and actually care about their Soldiers.

Brian Kime
C/345th MITSB

You won’t always get to work for great leaders. In those tougher times, what kept me going was my desire to be a filter between “higher hq” and my Soldiers. I believe that the Soldiers we are entrusted to lead matter more than the man or woman above us. As Emily LaCaille’s NCO told her, Soldiers deserve leaders that care.

Vernon Garner
HHC/58th BfSB

I am one of the lucky captains. My current leaders are, well, leaders. They are the reason I decided to become active National Guard Reserve and take the HHC [headquarters and headquarters company] commander position. They empower me to make decisions, and they coach and mentor me about both the good and bad things I do, which allows me to learn and grow. It may sound trite, I know, but they treat me with dignity and respect. I compare this with the bullying and disrespectful approach some of my previous leaders used. I’m not sure why they thought that was the best way to motivate Soldiers to get the job done. Maybe it was the only tool in their kit bag. It didn’t work! Rather, it was frustrating and undermined the mission. To return to the question, yes, local leaders make a tremendous difference. I am serving in my current role because of the leaders I work under now, and it’s safe to say that I would not have taken the command position under the previous regime.

Richard Moyers
C & HHC/2-35 IN

I remember a particular counseling session with a brigade commander. He started off by asking me how I would know what was important to him. I, being a somewhat cocky young company commander said, “I dunno, sir. You’ll tell me.” He laughed a little and then told me that what he spent his time and money on would reveal what he thought was really important. If he said training was important, but was never out at training, then it really wasn’t, no matter how much policy he published on it. If he said taking care of single Soldiers was important but wasn’t willing to spend the money to renovate the decaying barracks, then it really wasn’t. Time and money.

Then he asked me what my long-term goal was. Again, being a little bit of a smart ass, I said, “I dunno, sir ... sit in your chair?” He knew that I was being a smart ass, so he laughed and replied more soberly: “No, what do you want written on your tombstone? Every action you take or choose not to take may write or erase part of that epitaph.” So, we started a dialogue on what I defined as my long-term goals: good friend, good father, good husband, good son, good brother, etc. Note: all relationship stuff. So, he advised that as I come to decisions where these priorities and those of my career collide, I must make calculated decisions, and I must keep my epitaph in mind.

Not long after that, I was offered a second command, and I took it, fully knowing how that would demand on family time. But we negotiated it as a family and tried to manage that. I loved my command time.

Recently, I left active duty, in part because of the epitaph I want to be written. However, I stayed in the Army 10 years longer than I would have without that counseling session with my brigade commander. He demonstrated a genuine desire for me to live up to my potential in life, and didn’t just give the standard “stay-Army” pitch. Those pitches actually



"If you ask me who influenced me to stay in the Army," says CPT Ari Martyn, "my heart goes back to plebe year and the first leader to role model what it means to be an Army leader."

fail more often than they work because they are insincere.

That counseling was about two hours long on a Thursday evening. He ended it when his son called him asking if he was going to make it home to go fishing. He looked at me and said that his priorities had just collided. I smiled and stood to be dismissed. He was sincere *and* walked the talk.

Ari Martyn
B/1-68 AR

It was while I was a plebe (freshman) at West Point that I decided I would probably like this Army thing. My team leader—the yearling (sophomore) cadet who was in charge of me—was Cadet Will Wiebenga. He was a prior-service infantryman. Although I haven't had much contact with him since he graduated eight years ago, his impact was significant. He taught me to shine shoes, to disassemble the M240B machine gun ...; he helped me navigate the world of West Point, took care of making sure that I was not being harassed by upperclassmen, etc. He continued to follow me the next semester after he was no longer my

team leader. He cared, he loved what he did, he took the time to set the conditions for me to succeed to the best of my abilities, and he was a "cool" guy who I looked up to. To me, the line between West Point and the real Army was hazy because I had had no experience with the real Army. One could say that Cadet Wiebenga represented it to me because he was prior service, or I think you could look at it as though there was no distinction for me. West Point was all I knew of any part of the Army. Eleven years later, I've led Airborne, Ranger and mechanized infantry units in Afghanistan and Iraq, but if you ask me who influenced me to stay in the Army, my heart goes back to plebe year and the first leader to role model what it means to be an Army leader. It makes me realize that you may never fully appreciate the long-term impact you are having on someone, and it inspires me to want to lead every day in a way that has that kind of effect.

As these stories remind us, we are shaping the futures of those we lead. Yes, leadership counts! Not surprisingly, we find that leadership basics matter most—nothing fancy required: simply caring, taking time to genuinely talk with our subordinates about their development and future plans, creating opportunities for them to reconnect with the reasons they chose to serve in the first place, holding them accountable to fair standards, being a solid role model, loving our Soldiers and the Army, and explaining how much we need great leaders to stay in.

So, let's conspire together to do the basics. Let's build combat-effective teams and take care of our Soldiers. Let's develop our subordinates and inspire them to do the same.

Company commanders, please log in to the CC forum (<http://CC.army.mil>), where thousands of us are connecting in conversation about the things that matter most to us and our profession.

