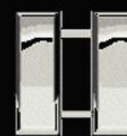




CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company-level Officers
From: Company-level Officers

What NOT to Do as a Platoon Leader

Young platoon leaders receive a lot of advice on what to do. Time-tested lessons such as to listen to their NCOs, be fit, be motivated, learn from their mistakes and take charge are valuable, but not the entire story. In the spirit of the television series *What Not to Wear*, we asked members of the Army's Platoon Leader Forum (<http://PL.army.mil>) what they have learned *not* to do as platoon leaders, based on their own experiences and observations.

1LT Scott Kuhn

Past PL, 2/C/2-7 CAV

Current CDR, D/2-7 CAV

Do not compromise your duty in an attempt to be popular. I was a platoon leader tasked with training and patrolling with my Iraqi army and Kurdish security forces counterparts in northern Iraq. I replaced a platoon leader early in the tour. My mission was to do trilateral patrols on a daily basis with our counterparts. My biggest struggle was reconciling the intense desire to have my guys "like" me with accomplishing my mission. On more than one occasion, I heard complaints that we patrol too much and for too long. The old platoon leader "never did it like that." It would have been so easy to

compromise standards, integrity and our mission to gain "brownie points" with the Soldiers, but doing so would have violated my values and undermined my Soldiers' respect for me, which ultimately derives from sticking to those values.

1LT Brock Young

Current PL, 3/670 MP CO, CAARNG

The worst thing I've seen my peers do is accept the answer, "We've got this, sir. It's NCO business." I've seen several good officers burned down because they didn't "trust but verify." I had a little easier time figuring when my NCOs were trying to fool me since I was once an NCO (MP PSG); however, that never stopped them from trying. Some things may be "NCO business," but new PLs who forget that they are responsible for everything their unit does or fails to do can end up on the wrong side of an FLIPL, commander's inquiry or Article 32 hearing. Platoon leaders should be kept apprised of *everything* that is going on within their platoon. Granted, they can let the NCOs handle the smaller discipline issues, but the PL still needs to know that there are discipline issues and what those issues are. My platoon knows that there are some things I will leave to them to deal



CPT Andrew Shattuck (center front) cautions platoon leaders: "Never, ever compromise your integrity. Do not try to come up with the whole plan yourself because ... it won't go well."

CPT Jonathon Woloshuk (second from left) advises platoon leaders “to treat your platoon like a family ... to be friendly while still maintaining your authority.” In addition, he warns not to allow counseling to fall by the wayside, including event-oriented written counseling.



with (late for formation, internal discipline issues, shirking), and they know that there are some things I will give my full attention (anything related to sexual assault, negligence or safety). They also know that I need to be kept aware of what's going on, no matter what it is. This is the trust we have. There is a fine line between micromanaging and doing your job, but that line exists. “You’ve got this? Roger, explain to me how. What is your plan? Do you need any resources? What can I do to assist with your plan? Does it meet the end state and parameters that I laid out?” “Why do I need to know?”—so I can explain it to my higher when they ask. “We’ve got this, sir,” is not an acceptable answer

when the company commander asks you how you’re going to accomplish a task or mission. Likewise, “My NCOs have got it, sir,” is definitely not an acceptable answer when your commander asks about the plan for fixing a discipline issue.

LTC Joseph Pishock

Past PL, 2/B/1-22 IN

Past CDR, C/112 SIG BN and SIG DET/75th RGR REGT

A dumb decision of mine was to challenge my company commander in public—because I thought I knew more than he did. I didn’t pipe up and declare, “That’s stupid,” but my body language and mannerisms sent that message. We

CompanyCommand Glossary

AAR- after-action review
AIR- airborne Infantry regiment
BSB- brigade support battalion
CAARNG- California Army National Guard
CAV- Cavalry
CDR- commander
COP- combat outpost
CR- Cavalry regiment
DET- detachment
Eye Pro- ballistic eye protection
FLIPL- Financial Liability Investigation of Property Loss
FRG- Family Readiness Group
IN- Infantry
LT- lieutenant
MP- Military Police

MWR- Morale, Welfare and Recreation
NCO- noncommissioned officer
NCOER- Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report
NJARNG- New Jersey Army National Guard
NTC- national training center
NVG- night-vision goggles
PIR- parachute Infantry regiment
PL- platoon leader
PSG- platoon sergeant
RGR REGT- Ranger regiment
S-2- intelligence
S-6- communications officer
SIG BN- signal battalion
STX- situational training exercise
VFW- Veterans of Foreign Wars

were at NTC trying to get the unit ready to enter “the box.” My platoon had already accomplished all the predeployment measures the commander was talking about. Since my platoon was ready to start training, I didn’t think his briefing applied to me. I should be left to run my platoon, right?

I failed to realize the larger picture. The other platoons were not as proactive or prepared as mine. Rather than trying to help them and set the example, I sat at the back of the briefing, rolling my eyes and acting like a punk. My commander had no choice but to stop his briefing and pull me outside for a well-deserved dressing down. I quickly realized that my behavior wasn’t helpful to the company—regardless of how prepared my platoon was.

My disrespect was borne of immaturity and a failure to appreciate that sometimes the boss does know what he or she is talking about. He needed to provide instructions for the other platoons and get them up to speed. It would have helped everyone if I had set a positive example; however, I wasn’t mature enough to look outside of my Bradleys and squads. My commander straightened me out, and I’d like to think that I learned then to put myself in my commander’s shoes prior to forming an opinion. He probably knows things that I don’t. I may not always agree with my boss, but I’ve learned not to wear my feelings on my sleeve.

CPT Andrew Shattuck

Past PL, 3/C/2-4 IN

Current CDR, B/2-54 IN

- Never, ever compromise your integrity.

- Do not try to come up with the whole plan yourself, because the platoon will let you do that, and it won’t go well.

- Do not be the leader who doesn’t adhere to platoon/company/battalion standards. Your Soldiers will get hemmed up, you won’t, and they will ask themselves, “How come the PL doesn’t have to wear Eye Pro on the COP?” You set the standard with everything you do.

- Do not tell your NCOs what they want to hear; tell them what they need to hear. Be the moral compass for your unit.

1LT Patrick Moore

Past PL, 1/D/2-113 IN; 2/F/250 BSB; 2/A/2-113 IN, NJARNG

Current CDR, A/2/113 IN

Do not trust that your supply discipline is handled; verify that it is. Regardless of how low you have sub-hand-receipted your platoon’s property, you are still ultimately responsible for it. You may be able to explain field loss, but when you have given the “up” on sensitive items and the commander shows up with one of your platoon’s assigned radios or NVGs, telling him, “But the platoon sergeant gave

me an ‘up’ ” will not cut it. Your Soldiers need to understand their part in the accountability chain. I learned my lesson quickly. In my first week as a platoon leader, my platoon sergeant signed out ProMasks [protective masks] for the platoon, which he then handed out with no controls. Two ProMasks came up missing at the end of the weekend. He took responsibility, but I took it as a lesson learned and covered the cost of one mask. Right then, I decided that supply discipline would be one of my hot buttons.

CPT Jonathon Woloshuk

Past PL, 3/B and Mortar PLT, 3-509 PIR

Current CDR, D/1-41 IN

Do not try to be buddies with your enlisted Soldiers. They work for you, and some don’t have the maturity to differenti-



1LT Brock Young (right) leads his platoon on a foot march. Once an NCO himself, he has learned that “platoon leaders should be kept apprised of everything that is going on within their platoon,” including any discipline issues.

ate between work and play. That being said, you need to treat your platoon like a family, so creating social events for your platoon is a good idea as long as that doesn’t bleed over into your private life. You need to learn to be friendly while still maintaining your authority.

Do not allow counseling to fall by the wayside. Enforce monthly and event-oriented written counseling. It will pay off big-time. Nobody wants to do counseling until there is a problem Soldier who ought to be chaptered but can’t be because there isn’t a pattern of misconduct documented by solid counseling. On the flip side, written counseling can also back up an impact award for a Soldier who has been exceptional. Don’t fail to do initial and monthly or quarterly counseling with your platoon sergeant. This will help you two get on the same page with what direction you want your platoon to go. It will also help make writing his annual NCOER a lot easier.



1LT Patrick Moore, shown here training on a sniper rifle, warns platoon leaders: "Do not trust that your supply discipline is handled; verify that it is." He advises them to teach Soldiers accountability.

LTC Pete Kilner

Past PL, 3/C and Scouts, 4-8 IN

Past CDR, D/2-325 AIR

My biggest mistake involved not holding my personnel cards close enough to my chest. Sitting in a Bradley on a range one day, passing the time with my gunner, I let my guard down and mentioned that I thought that SSG M., one of the section leaders, wasn't really that good. The next day, I could tell that SSG M. had gotten word of my comment, and our relationship was never the same. He no longer wanted to work for me and asked to be reassigned to a different platoon. Reflecting on my mistake, I don't know why I confided to a specialist my professional assessment of a staff sergeant.

My gunner and I were close and worked great together, but I failed to realize that he wasn't my confidant.

1LT James Johnson

S-6, 2/1 CR

Do not micromanage. Micromanaging puts limits on subordinates' potential to grow as leaders. It is a cancer that spreads when subordinate leaders follow the bad example. It also causes subordinate leaders to shelve excellent ideas and crushes innovation and creativity. Overall, micromanaging creates a work environment that is oppressive and can drive good, professional Soldiers to abandon a career in the Army.

Do not allow double standards, especially for yourself. Being overweight and lazy sends the message to Soldiers that it is acceptable to be overweight and lazy. All leaders should lead by example. Leading by example gives Soldiers a clear view of what

right looks like and takes away any excuses not to meet the standard. The term, "Do as I say, not as I do" is extremely detrimental to the development of Soldiers.

Anonymous Captain

I've seen more than a few things not to do as a PL.

- Do not think that you, as a lieutenant, have the authorization to read your Soldiers into "top secret" programs because you feel that it is important that your Soldiers know the exact details of programs that you could possibly get involved in. Let the S-2 shop do that. It's their job.

- Do not go out to the bars and clubs, get "blackout drunk" and act a fool with your Soldiers. If you have a few

1LT Scott Kuhn (second from left), with his interpreter and Iraqi army counterpart, speaks to a local shopkeeper while on patrol in northern Iraq. "My biggest struggle," he says, "was reconciling the intense desire to have my guys 'like' me with accomplishing my mission."



Tips for Your December Holiday Party

Unit holiday parties can make a positive impact on the morale and cohesion of our Soldiers and families. If you are preparing for a party this month, check out these tips:

■ “What we’ve done successfully in the past was organize squad or platoon competitions (either sports or military skills) that ended in a cookout. My PLs and I planned the competitions; the FRG did most of the planning for the cookout. The FRG also made little gift bags (cookies, candy canes, etc.) for the single Soldiers. We set up some crafts for the kids and also had some door prizes using raffle tickets handed out at the chow line. The cost was not prohibitive. There are various funds (FRG, MWR) that commanders can tap for different parts of the event. Getting buy-in from the FRG is important; getting buy-in from the first sergeant and PSGs is even more crucial. There must also be something to hold the attention of your single Soldiers.” —CPT Mikola King

■ “The best parties I’ve seen and participated in had something for everyone. We teamed up with the local YMCA and used their facility to offer bounce houses for kids (one for the tots, one for the older kids), basketball and an option for indoor swimming. We had some games (digital and analog) set up for people to play. We also had the standard Santa appearance and plenty of chow potluck style. The only costs were for the rental of the bounce houses and the Santa suit and some modest costs for paper goods. Involving the FRG in the entire process (planning, setup, execution and cleanup) greatly increases the attendance of families.” —LTC Rick Black

■ “Rent out a local VFW facility with plenty of space.

Make it a potluck so everyone is a contributor and the families all talk about the dishes. Have reasonable but tasteful decorations that the kids can take home. Hold a bag-toss tournament with prizes. Play holiday music, with one Christmas carol sung by all. Culminate with a visit by Santa, who hands out gifts to all the children.” —CPT Mark W.

■ “A two-hour holiday party is just long enough to make it a thorough event without being so long that people begin looking at their watches.” —CPT Micah Klein

■ “If anyone you know is a professional photographer or hobbyist, you could request that they volunteer their time to take pictures of the families with Santa Claus at the event. One way to approach this would be to suggest to the hobbyist that this would be a great way to build his or her portfolio, as long as the family members are willing to sign a model release allowing the photographer to use it for advertisement/portfolio.” —CPT Paula C.

■ “One of the hits from my Christmas party was the raffle. Our list of prizes included: a “breath of fresh air” (an empty bottle of water labeled “Fresh Air”); a “movie night” that entailed a ticket for the post shuttle bus to transport the winner to the free post theatre, and a bag of microwave popcorn; company T-shirts; four-day passes; a “Fix Anything Kit” composed of 550 cord, a roll of duct tape and a small can of WD-40; a “Free Trip Around the Sun, Duration 365 Days” coupon; “PT Leader” coupons; and dinner for four, cooked by members of the chain of command. Basically, we raffled anything we could think of that wasn’t too expensive.” —CPT Joyce Loudon

drinks, maybe get borderline drunk, make a classy exit via a safe source such as a taxi or friend coming to get you.

■ When you head to the field for field problems, do not lie on your cot and play video games while your Soldiers conduct STX lanes. Walk with them, observe and AAR/critique them. It means a lot to your Soldiers to know that you care about their training.

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It’s good to learn from our own mistakes, but it’s even better to learn from others’ mistakes! If you are a currently commissioned officer, we invite you to join the conversation about growing and leading combat-ready units at <http://CC.army.mil>. Share your stories of success and failure either in the forum or directly with the CC support team at peter.kilner@us.army.mil.

*Company commanders:
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...becoming more effective.**



Art by Jody Harmon

Have you joined your forum?