**Captain Dave Zelaya, Commander, B Co " Borzoi", 1-27 IN, 25th ID,**

**U.S. Army Hawaii**

**NO FEAR ON EARTH!**

**1. Can you describe the leader development program in your company? Describe your role in the process of designing and executing the program.**

Leader development is a passion of mine. Like other professions, our defining characteristic isn’t our equipment, it’s the expertise we’ve achieved amongst a group of people committed to a set of ideals. Along those lines, the development of our leaders should focus on creating those experts with those ideals. In B Co we’ve committed ourselves to leader development with a program that focuses on training and education. Training focuses on gaining the depth of knowledge to achieve expertise. Education focuses on gaining the breadth of knowledge to build a foundation on a set of ideals. Our training model is based on a deliberate progression that includes instruction, demonstration, deliberate practice, evaluation, retraining. It’s **nested** in the Army’s training model and is easy to understand. Our education program is built on a foundation of writing and public speaking. **Twice a year we hold a leader development week that culminates in an event that has leaders research a topic and brief it to an audience. Most recently, we had our leaders brief the result of historical case studies on the defense but we’ve also done leader solariums and staff rides.** Our writing program is based around our quarterly company newsletters. Each quarter a new leader writes and publishes a newsletter focused on the company’s training. The best submissions receive the opportunity to write about a topic of their choosing. Their work is then submitted and published on a professional journal or website.

The results of our program are hard to quantify and do not translate to any metrics tracked at any level; it does enrich the experience of our leaders and soldiers, foster trust and understanding across the company, and build adaptability, creativity, and agility in our people.

**2. As you look back on all of the things you did prior to taking command, is there one experience that prepared you for the responsibility/challenges of command more than any other? If so, please share a little bit about that experience and why it stuck with you.**

Being an OC/T at the Joint Readiness Training Center was the most developmental experience I’ve yet had in my career. As a junior captain I had the opportunity to observe company/troop commanders make decisions, make mistakes, and adapt to overcome very difficult situations. It was there that I learned that there really isn’t one way of doing anything; different leaders with different organizations used a variety of tools to accomplish their mission.

**3. What is one piece of advice unique to your command that will help other commanders in your branch/command situation? (HHC, Branch, Garrison, Recruiting etc).**

If you want something to happen it’s on you to **force it into existence**. You’re going to have to pry some time into your calendar to make it happen. You’ll have to scratch and claw through resourcing. You’ll have to compromise in some areas. You might even face resistance from subordinates and superiors to “prioritize” or “do it some other time.” All I can say is that if you really do care about something give it everything you have and do it until it’s done. Also, remember that “done” is better than “perfect.”

**4. How have you balanced your time as a Commander? What have been the most used tools or techniques for personal time management?**

While working as a brigade battle captain my brigade FSO pulled me aside as I struggled through a particularly miserable day and told me, **“Dave, you only need three things to run an organization: a calendar, a task tracker, and time to think.”** His advice stuck with me and to this day I’ve found that the best way to manage my time is to give myself time to think. It’s easy to go from day to day reacting to whatever fire presents itself. Honestly, I’ve seen many leader succeed operating that way. Sadly, it requires a significant amount of investment in time on a daily basis. What I’ve found is that leaders like that often survive but never really thrive. They can never get after that little bit of extra that makes events feel special and unique. For me to be able to get past the “knife fight” and find time to think I relied heavily on my training meeting. The standard doctrinal format allows for the development of a calendar and task tracker that allow a company commander to delegate and empower. In my personal case, I was able focus on the things that I valued as a commander as my team was able to focus on the day-to-day.

**5. How have you dealt with counseling, both superiors and subordinates? Do you feel one is more challenging than the other?**

As a staff officer awaiting command, a mentor counseled me to think about my “cornerstone concept” or in his words “the thing that would act as the foundation for everything else you do as a commander.” He said that for some it was training, and for others, it was accountability. For him it was counseling. He told me, “counseling encompasses all other things but at its center is a conversation between people. The people are what make an operation successful, account for equipment, uphold standards, and train subordinates.” When I took command I decided counseling would be my cornerstone concept. I counsel two levels down to my squad leaders on a quarterly basis. When they come in for their counseling they should have an updated evaluation support form and counseling packets for the soldiers they rate. We discuss enumeration, their performance/potential in relation to the leader attributes and skills, and end the counseling with their views on how we can make the company better. I’ve found that for counseling to be effective it has to be sincere and honest. That often means having a difficult conversation with an underperforming leader but if done regularly they at least know what they can do to address a weakness and improve it over time.