



Sustaining Leader Presence through Communication, Relationships, and Education

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Advanced Leaders Course Class 001-20

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The United States Army is known for its core values. While each individual is expected to uphold these core values, it is the effort of great leaders entrusted to teach, mold, and mentor Soldiers throughout the Army's ranks in order to be successful. Leaders are expected to continuously guide and motivate those under their charge. The belief is that strong leadership yields positive results for accomplishing the mission and Soldier welfare simultaneously. Establishing yourself as a strong and positive leader is only one part of ensuring an effective presence. Leaders must also sustain their presence through respectful communication, build trusting relationships, and provide motivation for continuous education.

Communication is a key element in establishing yourself as a good leader and is essential in sustaining a presence that will contribute greatly to the success of both your peers and subordinates. A successful leader needs to convey their expectations concisely to ensure information is received in the most effective way possible. Breakdowns in communication could end with a disastrous result or a product that was never intended on creating in the first place. What this means is, as leaders, our Soldiers rely upon us to effectively and accurately relay information to them in order to ensure our missions are met with success. Making sure you are transparent with your information will only guarantee that your intent is met. There is nothing worse than a Soldier losing confidence in their leaders simply because they created a communication barrier due to lack of information or misinformation. From personal experience as a young Soldier, there was a specific instance where almost an entire work day had passed and the section was assembling for formation only to experience poor communication with our leader. Instead of the formation commencing and the Soldiers being dismissed on time, our leader ended up assigning Soldiers a plethora of tasks to complete that same day. These tasks

would require hours to take in order to be completed correctly. As a young Soldier, the worst part of this situation was finding out that these tasks were well known by this leaders hours beforehand and they simply forgot to relay the information to the section. As Soldiers in the United States Army, we understand that not everything will go as planned and often times a person may be asked to perform tasks outside of “normal working hours.” If this was a one-time event, most subordinates could look past the inconsideration of being asked to do something that could have been taken care of prior to a typical end of work day. However, when the same leadership continues to do this on what seems like a weekly basis, one begins to question the effectiveness and care of their leader. A person loses confidence in leadership’s ability due to their lack of communication and ability to share information in a timely manner. This personal experience became a solid foundation for change with my career as a leader. It was that specific situation, on that specific day, where being a strong and successful leader meant not making the same mistake as displayed by that leadership. This meant ensuring communication became a priority. Junior Soldiers needed to be given information and guidance in a timely manner. In order to prevent a breakdown of communication, leaders have to plan accordingly within the mission and their Soldier’s capabilities (and schedule). According to Vanita Bellen, “presence is felt rather than assumed” (Forbes Coaches Council, 2019). A good leader that communicates effectively, will create a presence that is felt not only in that section, but throughout the unit as well. Effective communication will contribute greatly to a strong and effective leadership presence.

Building relationships is another essential element in establishing your presence as a good leader. Being able to communicate effectively will contribute to building great relationships, not only amongst your subordinates, but with your peers and seniors alike.

Mission accomplishment is a direct result in your Soldiers having the motivation and direction to do so. If your Soldiers trust you, they will perform for you. How do you build those great relationships? Embodying the Army's cores values; specifically integrity, honor, and selfless service. This will assist leaders in establishing those important relationships required to be successful. The Army is built to give motivated individuals the opportunity to prove themselves as strong leader. As the Noncommissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC) of the Military Justice section as a newly promoted Sergeant, meant that I had to ensure the Soldiers within that section were not only trained and proficient in their jobs, but I had to also take into consideration their personal growth within their careers. During this time, my two priorities were that the Soldiers believed in my ability to lead, but that they could trust me. This was accomplished by constantly keeping them informed and ensuring that they were always taken care of. This also meant being consistent in that practice. Being uniformed can cause stress, confusion, and the inability to be prepared. Sudhakar I. Prabu stated, "Understanding yourself helps the understanding of others. Having clarity on who you are why you make certain choices, your natural way of responding to situations is important to understand those around you" (Prabu, 2016). Knowing the type of leader I wanted to be greatly contributed to an office that was cohesive. Having the Soldiers trust lead to never having to ask for anything more than once and never being met with any resistance on what was expected of them. They were motivated and dedicated to our mission because I was motivated and dedicated to theirs.

Knowledge is an important part of both professional and personal growth. One way to advance a person's knowledge is through education. With experience and knowledge, leaders can be a vital resource for those following them. For those in junior positions, it is important that leaders allow them to think and work within their occupational field, while supervising to ensure

the mission is being accomplished. Strong leaders use their knowledge to guide those under their charge. For example, while working in the Military Justice section, a junior Soldier was asked to prepare an action for her unit in regards to an Army Regulation (AR) 635-200, Chapter 18, Army Body Composition Program. The Soldier was unsure of how to start and complete the action, so she looked to her leadership for guidance. In order to mentor her in a way that would be effective and not waste time, it was important that the Soldier knew where to find the answer with little assistance. For this to happen, it meant her leadership needed to be knowledgeable in the regulations that governed such a process. She was given clear direction of where to begin her research and directed to report back with what she had found. From that moment on, the Soldier knew how to proceed with an AR 635-200, Chapter 18 action. That was just one aspect of the element of sustaining leader presence through education. Providing direction on how to further one's career when it comes to civilian education is also key. In today's Army, emphasis on civilian education is paramount if a Soldier is pursuing the military as a career choice. Staff Sergeant Adam E. Wahl stated "when Soldiers do not place a priority on furthering their education while still wearing the uniform, The Army is losing out on having these educated Soldiers in their ranks" (Wahl, 2016). Having an educated force only further equips us with the power to be that much stronger. On the other hand, ensuring your Soldier is provided the necessary direction and time to at least start their civilian education will also be beneficial to them if they decide after their enlistment is up to move on from the Army. Leaders have to be knowledgeable when it comes to education as it will only help grow and mold the future of the Army and contribute to greater people in general within the civilian population.

Being a strong professional leader means having the ability to sustain your presence through communication, relationships, and education. Ensuring you are able to communicate

effectively with your Soldiers helps build a strong professional relationship. Once you have those strong relationships, you can then focus on the educational aspect of being a leader.

Education is not only for the leader themselves, it is for all Soldiers. Leaders not only teach their Soldiers, but they should learn from them as well. The importance of doing so allows for not only mission accomplishment, but troop welfare. This leads to the overall success of the U.S. Army.

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Growing Adaptive Leaders

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Military Operations are constantly changing - evolving based on circumstances that include the enemy's tactics, the environmental conditions where operations take place, and politics. Leaders on the ground have little to no control over such circumstances, which leads us to the subject of growing adaptive leaders. What is an adaptive leader, and what does this individual do to acclimate themselves and their Soldiers to conditions they cannot control? What is the best way to groom Soldiers to become accustomed to change, and does resiliency have a role? In this essay I will answer these questions and briefly explain why this subject is essential to the success of the military.

“As earlier defined by several academic scholars and Army doctrine, adaptive leaders influence behavior in response to change by effectively communicating to their subordinates the purpose for change, the outcomes of change, and the way ahead in order to build the understanding, consensus, and collaboration necessary for subordinates to adapt, embrace, and help guide the organization's roadmap for success“ (Sharpe & Creviston, 2013). According to ADRP 6-22 (2012), “Adaptability has two key components: the ability to identify the essential elements critical for performance in each new situation and the ability to change practices or the unit by quickly capitalizing on strengths and minimizing weaknesses.” Adaptive leaders are individuals that find ways to accomplish a mission in a changing environment by developing tactics to conform to circumstances they face. They make a decision and take action based on the mission intent and are ready to adapt when uncertainty arises. An adaptive leader motivates their Soldiers to accept change and refocus their strengths to accomplish the mission. They are confident and maintain discipline, which is necessary for mission success in the face of uncertainty. Adaptive leaders have the ability to control their thinking. They have a positive influence on their subordinates when change occurs. The description of an adaptive leader can

make some believe that this individual is rare. Though there are some that are exceptional leaders, rare is not the case as leaders can develop the skills necessary to become an adaptive leader. Much is expected from those who are given the opportunity to lead, which brings us to the next question of what is the best way to develop these skills and groom Soldiers to become adaptive leaders?

There are two principles for developing adaptive leaders. The first is a training experience that develops the ability to respond during emerging situations. “This encourages adaptive thinking. Adaptive training involves variety, particularly in training that may have become routine. Leaders who remain safely inside their comfort zone provided by their current level of education, training, and experience will never learn to recognize change or understand inevitable changes in their environment” (ADRP 6-22, 2012). It is vital for leaders to seek other opportunities that are challenging. “Leaders must seek out and engage in assignments that involve major changes in the operational environment” (ADPR 6-22, 2012). Constantly working under conditions that are comfortable produces complacency, which can lead to fear when a situation arises, or one is moved to another unit where task and requirements are more challenging. Situations like this can result in a subpar performance, or failure. Units that expect more can lose confidence in the individual’s abilities, ultimately resulting in distrust. The second principle is practice and feedback. “Individuals should have the opportunity to practice new skills, obtain feedback on their results, and apply what they learned from this feedback in subsequent practice sessions” (Mueller-Hanson, White, Dorsey & Pulakos 2005). In this principle, it is possible for leaders to develop ways on how to improve task standards by testing and applying different ways to achieve better results. Leaders should always seek self-improvement and motivate their subordinates to do the same. Doing this not only develops a

leader, but also improves the unit's ability to accomplish its mission. Constant changes in the military environment show the need for highly effective adaptive leaders at all levels.

Developing adaptive performance is not an easy process and may not be easily mastered by a few training exercises. What traits must an individual have to become adaptive leader?

There are eight dimensions that can be grouped into three overarching types of adaptability. Each group is extremely important in developing adaptive Army leaders. The first is mental adaptability, which includes the ability to adjust to changing work conditions, handle unpredictable emergency situations, and work under stress to solve problems creatively as well as quickly learn new work task, technologies, and procedures. The second is interpersonal adaptability, which includes the ability to demonstrate relational skills and adapt to different cultures. The last group is physical adaptability. This is the ability to adjust to a harsh environment, maintain weight, and develop physical strength for task that might require power and endurance. When developing adaptive leaders, we must consider the individual's personality traits that are related to adaptability. It is self-efficacy that reflects confidence in the ability to maintain control over one's own emotions, motivation, behavior and openness, which refers to one's curiosity, broadmindedness and openness to new events and environments. These traits can produce an individual's desire to master task and produce results above standards. Now let's take a look at the role that resiliency plays in the actions of an adaptive leader.

“Resilience is the mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral ability to face and cope with adversity, adapt to change, recover, learn, and grow from setbacks” (AR 350-53, 2014). To become an adaptive leader and perform well under uncertainties, leaders must be resilient. “The goal of CSF2 (Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness) to increase resilience and performance enhancement skills by building on the following Five Dimensions of Strength:

physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and family” (AR 350-53, 2014). Three of the five dimensions are similar to those described as required for an adaptive leader, and they are physical, emotional, and social. Possessing physical fitness is the first dimension that is necessary for both resiliency and becoming an adaptive leader. This dimension is a confidence booster that can be seen by other leaders and subordinates, producing a level of respect. The social dimension, as written for resiliency is an excellent example of what is required in developing an adaptive leader. “Leaders must actively seek out diverse relationship and situations to gain insight into people who think and act differently than most Soldiers or average United States citizens. Leaders can grow their capacity for adaptability by seizing such opportunities” (ADRP 6-22, 2012). Control over oneself is crucial in an adaptive leader’s performance. Lack of emotional control can make a leader unfit to perform their duties.

In conclusion, for the military to be at its best with the constant changes it faces, all leaders must be able to adapt to uncertainty and resolve issues that may arise. Adaptive leaders must be resilient and seek to improve their strength in using the five dimensions as outlined by Army Regulation for resiliency. They must possess the physical ability to perform in harsh environments having the stamina to lead subordinates and accomplish the mission fulfilling the commander’s intent. They must be mentally tough and able to maintain control of themselves and their subordinates; especially during uncertainty or a crisis. Communication is another crucial element as it is important for subordinates to clearly understand their leader’s intent and perform with the confidence needed to accomplish any task. They must be able to adapt to different cultures and communicate not just verbally but also physically by showing respect. Becoming an adaptive leader is not easy and requires training, practice, and the willingness to seek self-improvement.

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