

Crucible events and their impact on leadership



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One of the most important aspects a leader should possess is the ability to change his approach to the dynamic environment and culture that leaders phase in all organizations. Jawarlal Nehru said “ A leader or a man of action in a crisis almost always acts subconsciously and then thinks of the reasons for his action”. In this thesis I will like to point out two significant events that have changed my leadership style and will carry over not just to my military career but my personal life as well.

The first crucible, that has helped to make me a better leader as a young battery commander I had with one of my Lieutenants that changed my approach towards what I believed is the perfect combination of a strong character leader and the sensitivity every leader should display at all levels of command. The second crucible event I will describe in this paper is the experience of working for a toxic leader who was reluctant to listen, understand and visualize problems during critical situations.

As a future organizational leader I believe leaders need to understand and facilitate the legal orders given by their superior officers and at the same time display respect to the Soldiers affected by such orders. The organizational leader is the most important leader in the military because is the bridge that senior officers use in the military use pass order down the chain of command while at the same time the organizational leader needs to recognize the subordinates needs an pass these needs up the chain to the senior leadership to reach harmony in organization’s climate.

The most important event that has impacted my leadership style was a conversation I had with my fire control officer platoon leader. As a battery

commander I was always leaning forward leader aggressiveness was my nickname always volunteering for difficult missions, leading the battery and the battalion during all NATO execution evaluations, maintenance programs and deployment operations.

After several weeks of intense, hard training in the fields during the winter of 2005 in the cold training areas of the German Bavarian fields, my fire control platoon leader asked to see me to discuss the progress of the training and the way ahead. Before the meeting I had already planned out the next few weeks of training and had in mind set the conditions for a successful evaluation. In contrast to my expectations my right hand man and primary trainer had a completely different view of the way ahead. During our conversation he explained that the unit has been in the field for over a month and the training was not going well and that the unit was set to fail the most important evaluation before deploying to Operation Iraqi Freedom. He argued that exhaustion and morale was taking a load on the Soldiers and leaders at the platoon level and that soon the unit will break down if we continue to train at the level we have been for the last few weeks. His recommendation was to stop all training give the Soldiers and leaders time to go home re-unite with their families, reset and conduct maintenance back at garrison and then go through the evaluation.

I was shocked to hear his recommendations especially after my assessment of the unit was the complete opposite to what his was. After serious mental and operational planning in my command tent I decided to change my approach against the battalion commanders' guidance that was to prepare

at all cost to successfully complete the critical evaluation and to set the conditions for the battalion to succeed in follow on evaluations.

After conducting a personal assessment of the situation I instructed my 1SG to conduct a similar assessment and to look at the moral and readiness of the unit after four weeks of continuous training. The outcome of both assessments were that the Soldiers were tired and that was impacting the quality of the training, another finding was that the Soldiers felt that I was taking time away from their families a few months before deployment and that morale was low.

Immediately, I instructed my executive officer to request march credits to return to base with-in 48 hours and not to tell anyone in the unit of the request until the request was approved by the battalion S4 and that I will be the person to tell the unit of the change. The march credits were approved and I notify the unit that we were going back to garrison with-in 48 hours for a tactical pause. I faced the problem of the evaluation with a new training plan incorporating some time off for the Soldiers and leaders in my unit.

With four weeks of continuous hard training and with four more weeks before execution time I decided to bring the unit to a tactical pause, for two weeks giving the Soldiers additional time to rest and recover, one week with their families away from the motor pool and the unit and the second week was to go back to the motor pool to conduct maintenance on the equipment in normal duty hours. This change brought the unit's morale up and it also helped with the maintenance of the equipment but most importantly the Soldiers felt that their leaders care and that their leaders would take care f

them. I accepted risk by stopping training but morale was up and it showed when the unit smoked the tactical evaluation and set the standards to the whole battalion. I learned that the Soldiers were ready to perform and that I was to focus on the mission and forgot to look at the unit's climate; Soldiers stress level and level of the unit's development. The conversation I had with this helpful prior service Lieutenant help me in visualizing the level of the organizations development, understanding morale and to apply sensitivity at the right time to alleviate stress in the unit.

The second crucible event that has shaped my leadership style was during my last deployment in which I served as planner to the Multinational Force-Iraq and as an advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. Key for a successful deployment was to revamp the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior development, planning and execution processing and to keep the commanding general inform of the Iraqi progress.

After realizing that I could not do be a staff officers and an advisor I raised the issue to my superior officer that I had too many tasks and responsibilities and that both jobs required more than one person and that a special staff was need it to handle both the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and Interior advising mission and the staff officer to keep the CG inform of the MODs and MOIs progress. During the conversation with my boss I was label as a renegade who complained about my job. I quickly realized that I had to do as told until a new superior officer arrived or until my deployment was up.

I considered the problem for a few hours and following CGs guidance to develop the Iraqi capacity to manage their security forces effectively and to gain their trust, and to gain the local population support for the coalition to eliminate the remnants of the insurgency in Baghdad I decided that the advisory task was the priority. In an internal staff meeting my superior officer told me that I had to do better as a staff officer and that the charts for the CGs staff meeting were not up to date and that if I continued with my poor performance I was to be relieved of my duties.

I quickly thought about his comments and asked him to give me a few hours to update the CGs slides and that I will be comfortable to brief the CG during the update. He agreed to give me a few hours now 2100 everyone went back to their trailers including my superior and I stayed a little longer developing a new slide that took me one hour to build. The slide reflected the current state of the coalition staff and the current state of the Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior and my recommendations to improve their capacity to take control of their force management process.

At 0920 the following morning I briefed the CG in front of his senior staff. During the briefing I asked the CG to hold any questions until my last slide, the one I built that evening. As I briefed the CG and the senior staff old charts and a lot of red showed on the slides driving the CG and the DCG to take copious notes, two charts into the briefing and the CG instructed me to go my final chart for the questioning session, after showing my last chart I answered all the questions they had, and my recommendations to fix the problems.

The CG asked if other to the other staff sections if they had the same problem and 90% of them said that they have the same issues. That same morning I was promoted to advise the senior Iraqi Staff at the ministries and my boss was changed of position, I realized I was dealing with a toxic leader who was infecting the whole staff and that was affecting the whole staff causing friction with the Iraqi counterparts and was degrading the staff ability to visualize the CG objectives.

In conclusion, I believe that my experiences as a battery commander and during my last deployment shaped, helped, and caused me to be a better leader. The experience of my battery command, and to respectfully listen to a subordinate and my ability to give him credit for my success as battery commander and the experience to work with a toxic leader will shape my vision to carry on the orders of my superior officers and at the same time take into consideration the consequences of these orders on the Soldiers life.

As an organizational leader I believe the leader needs to understand the level of the units organizational development, (for example is the unit in the sheet of music or are there are variables in readiness or other issues), is the unit has been loaded with mission and the Soldiers are stress, and finally to develop leaders that understand, visualize, describe problems and execute missions to solve the identified problems.