

***Stephen Oliver's Inner Circle and,
the NAPMA Peak Performer's 2012 -
A year of Excellence:***

Service, Abundance, and Leadership

Leadership Lessons from West Point

Edited by Major Doug Crandall

Foreword by Jim Collins

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In 2005, I had the privilege of visiting West Point for a gathering of leaders from business, social sectors, and the military. One of my hosts, a captain in the U.S.. Army, had obtained an M.B.A. after graduating from West Point. "What most surprised you about business school after your West Point experience?" I asked. "The misperceptions my M.B.A. classmates had about Army training and its relevance for leadership outside the military," he responded. He then described a debate that had erupted in one of his classes, and how one of his classmates had challenged, "In the Army, you don't really need to lead because soldiers are so well trained to follow orders."

If leadership exists only if people follow when they have the freedom not to follow, I thought perhaps his classmate had a point. After all, civilian life does not have the same clear chain of command as the US Army. When I pushed on this point, the captain responded that, yes, the Army has a clear chain of command, but Army leaders face one giant reality that business leaders rarely face: "In business, if you make bad decisions, people lose money, and perhaps jobs," he said. "In the military, if you make bad decisions, nations can fall and people can die."

The phrase stuck in my mind: *people can die*. In the Army, it matters to your very existence if your leaders are competent. It matters if your leaders are trustworthy. It matters if your leaders care more about themselves than they do about their people or the mission. Your life may well depend on it. Combine this truth with the larger mission of protecting national interest and advancing the cause of freedom, and you get a context for leadership rarely faced in the normal course of business. This wonderful book gives us a glimpse into the lessons of leadership that can best be grasped in the face of high stakes and large consequences. Upon receiving the manuscript, I began my standard reading process of flipping through the chapter title pages to get a sense of the overall work before delving into a page-by-page read. But along the way, I found myself drawn in, stopping to read entire chapters

before completing my initial scan, increasingly excited by the project. These writers blend their very real experiences with thoughtful frameworks, bringing them to life with vivid stories.

Disciplined people who engage in disciplined thought and who take disciplined action: this framework captures much of what separates greatness from mediocrity. The Army has long embraced this concept with its own framework of leadership: Be-Know-Do. This framework runs through these chapters, like a thread of DNA. The beauty of this book lies in the dualities of leadership—knowing when to follow and when to not follow, the responsibility to question and the responsibility to execute, dedication to mission first and dedication to your comrades above all. These dualities highlight the point that disciplined action does not mean rote action. Disciplined action means that you begin with a framework of core values (*be*), you meld those values with knowledge and insight (*know*), and finally you make situation-specific decisions to act (*do*). Leadership, the chapters in this book teach, begins not with what you *do*, but who you *are*.

Encoded into the West Point approach are two eternal truths. First, the medium- and long-term future cannot be predicted, and second, the best "strategy" in a volatile environment lies in having the right people who embody your organization's core values and who can adapt to unanticipated challenges. West Point exists not to train soldiers for a specific war but to develop leaders who can adapt to whatever war might be thrust on our nation—no matter what continent, no matter what conditions, no matter what form of warfare, no matter what enemy.

West Point answers the question "Can leadership be learned?" with the idea that whether you like it or not, you *are* a leader. The real question is whether you will be an *effective* leader. In reading this book, I realized that West Point also addresses a question that I've been wrestling with: Can Level 5 Leadership be developed? In our research into why some companies become great while others do not, my colleagues and I observed that leadership capabilities follow a five-level hierarchy, with Level 5 at the top. At Level 1, you are a highly capable individual. At Level 2, you become a contributing team member. At Level 3, you become a competent manager. At Level 4, you become an effective leader. Stepping up to Level 5 requires a special blend of personal humility and professional will—the capacity to channel your personal ambitions and capabilities into a larger cause or mission. Level 5 leaders differ from Level 4 in that they are ambitious first and foremost for the cause, the organization, the mission, the nation, the work—*not themselves*—and they have the will to do whatever it takes (within the bounds of the organization's core values) to make good on that ambition. These chapters show that West Point is in the business of developing not just leaders, but *Level 5* leaders; the ideals of service, dedication to cause, loyalty to comrades, sacrifice, courage, and honor shine through these pages.

Toward the end of my visit to West Point, I had the privilege of conducting a small seminar for soon-to-graduate cadets, invited by a few members of the faculty who penned some of these chapters. One senior cadet, who would almost certainly graduate to dangerous duty in the Middle East, said to me that he felt more fortunate than his friends who had gone to places like Harvard and Stanford. "No matter how the rest of my life unfolds," he explained, "I know that I have served a larger cause than myself." Earlier that day, a senior general officer commented that this current generation of West Point graduates stands as one of the most inspired—and inspiring—since the graduating class of 1945.

I came away from those sessions struck by the contrast between these young men and women and my graduating class from college in 1980. For two decades, we lived in a world of artificial stability, made possible by America's triumph in the Cold War, combined with an era of perverted prosperity culminating in the stock market bubble of the late 1990s. My generation had no larger cause, no overriding ethos of service, no great object that extracted our sacrifice. And we are poorer for it. The West Point leaders who introduced me to these inspired cadets, and who write so passionately in this book about the principles of courage, sacrifice and commitment, helped me to see that this younger generation of idealistic men and women deserve not to be just students of their elders but—equally—our teachers.

September 2006 Boulder, Colorado

Leadership Lessons from West Point

What exactly does the U.S. Military Academy at West Point do to earn the reputation of being one of the world's top places for leadership development?

As a follow up from last month's article on the Mental Training techniques used at West Point, we'll explore some of the Leadership strategies used to train cadets - and how you too can apply them in training your athletes.

CHALLENGE, SUPPORT, ASSESSMENT, REFLECTION

The overall structure of leadership development at West Point revolves around four primary areas: challenge, support, assessment, and reflection. As a coach, you too can apply these same principles in developing your players' athletic skills and leadership skills.

Challenge - People only grow when they are pushed beyond their comfort zone. This holds true on the field/court, in the classroom, in the weight room, or as a leader. The Army provides cadets with a variety of physical and mental challenges including rigorous classroom work, physical tests, obstacle courses, battle simulations, etc. Instructors intentionally create distractions, delays, and other problems to see how well the cadets can

handle them in an effort to push leaders out of their comfort zone.

Similarly, as a coach you should be continually challenging your players out of their comfort zones. Be sure that your practice plans focus on areas that stretch your athletes skills. Use drills that force them to meet a certain standard of excellence before moving on. Are you providing your athletes with enough challenge to stretch their capabilities?

Support - While challenge is necessary to push both cadets and athletes, support is necessary to sustain them. The Army provides support through mentoring both from senior officers and peers. Like athletes, cadets receive a great deal of coaching to build confidence and maintain optimism.

In the athletic world, athletes must feel like their coaches are in their corner. Jody Adams, a former point guard for Pat Summitt puts it this way. "Pat knew when she should push you, and when she needed to reel you back in." Successful coaches know how far they can challenge their athletes, then are willing to support them before they get to the breaking point.

Assessment - Cadets are continually provided feedback on their performances in virtually every context. They are graded on their performance in drills, simulations, and exercises. This feedback-rich environment helps them clearly know where they stand.

Carolina men's basketball coach Roy Williams and his assistants continually chart practices as well as grade films immediately following games. They too grade their players on such small yet meaningful things like the quality of screens they set for their teammates. The players receive their feedback within 24 hours of the game, while it is still fresh in their minds. The objective feedback helps them to identify their strengths and focuses them on any areas to improve.

Reflection - It takes some time for the lessons of training to sink in. Therefore, cadets are often asked to reflect on their experiences to glean important lessons in their development. AARs, or After Action Reviews, allow cadets to reflect on their decisions, learn lessons, and grow as leaders.

Similarly, we have our Emerging Leaders in the Carolina Leadership Academy write a leadership reflection paper at the end of the program. The reflection paper focuses on critical lessons gained throughout the program. The paper helps the student-athlete synthesize their learnings during the year - and helps us see what they gained from the experience - and how they plan to use it.

ARE YOU SENDING THEM BACK BETTER THAN WHEN THEY CAME?

Colonel Bob Johnson says, *"We're here to build leaders, not people who call home crying every five minutes. We will be fair, and we will be hard. We will teach him to be responsible, we will teach him to solve problems; when he gets home you will see a change in his demeanor. We'll send them back to you better than you sent them to us."*

West Point makes a commitment to results. They have to because lives depend on them. They trust that their training forges leaders.

As a coach, can you too commit to parents that their children will be better after spending time with you and your program? Of course, they should be better fundamentally and sport skill wise after a season. But the real key is - **Will they be better people after spending a season with you?** Will parents see a positive improvement in their kid's attitude, confidence, commitment, and character? Beyond sport skills, what are the biggest life skills you teach your athletes?

HOW TO TEACH RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

"New cadets are allowed four responses: 'Yes, sir,' 'No, sir,' 'No excuse, sir,' and 'Sir, I do not understand.'" It takes a couple of tries before the neophytes learn the codes. It will take a little longer for them to stop trying to explain things. In that phrase, "No excuse, sir" (or "ma'am") is an early, critical lesson. Take responsibility for your actions. Always. No matter what the consequences. It is a lesson they will hear repeated for four years. Most of them will get it." (Ed Ruggero in the book, Duty First)

West Point knows that all leadership begins with self leadership. If a cadet cannot lead herself effectively by accepting full responsibility for her actions, she will never have the respect of her peers or supervisors.

Similarly, if you want your athletes to be effective leaders and people, you must first teach them how to effectively lead themselves. Hold them accountable for simple things like showing up on time, being prepared, and being respectful. You also must hold them accountable for more complex things like their attitude and focus following mistakes, and taking on life's challenges independently, rather than letting mom or dad fight their battles for them.

READY TO STAND ON A STREET CORNER IN BOSNIA OR BAGHDAD?

When training cadets, Colonel Olson keeps this one sobering question in mind: *"Is he ready to stand on a street corner in Bosnia (or now Baghdad) in a few years?"*

The staff at West Point has the awesome responsibility both to the country and the cadet to make sure the person is properly prepared to eventually handle the demands of leading in battle conditions.

Because lives are on the line, they can't afford to slack on the intensity of the training. They cannot in good conscience send someone into battle who is ill-prepared - for their sake and the entire unit.

Colonel Olson's question is one that continues to echo in my head. And I hope it impacts you too...

Yes, our athletes will not likely ever be in Bosnia or Baghdad. Yet the challenges they will face some day will still be critically important to them and the people they lead. We owe it to them to properly prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead.

For more insight into leadership training at West Point, I highly recommend the following books: *Duty First* by Ed Ruggero *Leadership Lessons from West Point* edited by Major Doug Crandal

HOW TO CREATE WEST POINT WARRIORS: Mental Toughness on the Playing Fields and Battlefields

Wonder what the U.S. Military Academy does to prepare their cadets to lead and stay mentally tough under the life and death stress of combat conditions?

I recently had the amazing chance to meet with the staff of the Army's Center for Enhanced Performance (CEP) to share some of the lessons I have learned about leadership as well as tour their state of the art facility at West Point.

The program, headed by Dr. Nate Zinsser, is definitely on the cutting edge when it comes to developing mentally tough warriors who are prepared to compete and win on the playing fields and battlefields.

Here's a rare glimpse into some of the elite mental training techniques used at the Army's Center for Enhanced Performance - as well as how you can adapt these high tech ideas with your own team.

SUCCESS CDs - How to script a winning mindset.

One of the most common techniques used by the CEP is to have the cadets create Success CDs. Whether it is for an upcoming athletic competition, final exam, obstacle course challenge, or marksmanship test, CEP has cadets write out their specific goals and why they want to achieve them. They then have the cadets create a detailed script outlining exactly what they should be focusing on to achieve their specific goals.

The cadet selects a motivating track of music that is played in the background as they record themselves reading their success script. When mixed together, the cadet then has a customized visualization CD that they can listen to regularly as they mentally prepare for their challenge.

What you can do:

You too can have your athletes write out a script of how they want to think and feel when they compete. Have them read it daily, especially before games - or have them create a CD with background music that they can listen to often.

Team Captains Network Members: Click on the link below for detailed directions on creating a Success Script - and see an actual example used by an athlete whose script helped her make the U.S. National Team.

ALPHA CHAMBER - Seeing is believing.

In addition to creating success scripts, the CEP has a half dozen alpha chambers - the egg-shaped chair seen in the picture. These alpha chambers provide a comfortable environment as well as built in speakers to create a relaxed and comfortable setting, which optimizes visualization.

In a relaxed state, the cadet then watches a huge projection screen in front of him. The CEP uses a helmet camera to video record a variety of real situations the cadet will find himself in. For instance, the helmet cam has been used with quarterbacks as they come up to the line of scrimmage to help them effectively scan opposing defenses so that they can make their reads correctly.

The dreaded Obstacle Course has also been filmed using the helmet cam to help cadets get a real feel for the challenges of the course. Being able to successfully experience the situations multiple times in their minds builds the cadets' confidence and ultimately prepares them for the rigors of the real life events.

What you can do:

You too can guide your athletes through visualizations of how you would like to perform for upcoming competitions. Have them imagine themselves at various points of the competition performing successfully. Without your own helmet cam, it is best to have your athletes visualize from an internal perspective - which means seeing the whole situation from their own eyes, rather than watching themselves perform as if on TV.

DYNAVISION BOARD - Performing under stress.

The board you see to the right is the DynaVision Board. This flat panel is made up of over a 100 individual lights. The lights can flash on and off in a variety of speeds, frequencies, and patterns.

Like the arcade game Whack-a-Mole, the cadet must spot the light and quickly touch it before it disappears. The board can be set to operate at higher speeds to maximize perceptual acuity.

Further, the CEP staff will increase the stress of the activity by blaring music and/or having the cadet count backwards from 100 by threes while doing the activity. And if that isn't enough chaos and challenge, they will also sometimes have the person try to complete the activity while standing on a balance board.

Obviously, this high state of stress is designed to approximate the chaotic conditions of battle to see if the cadet can still maintain his composure while trying to quickly perceive and act upon appropriate stimuli.

What you can do:

Some baseball and softball coaches working on perceptual ability write numbers on the ball to see how well their players can identify them when hitting. You can also have your athletes perform their sport skills while squirting them with a water bottle.

The whole key is to see if your athletes can maintain their focus on the task at hand despite the distractions and chaos going on around them.

MENTALLY READY FOR BATTLE

Ultimately, because skills like concentration, composure, and mental toughness are so critical to a soldier's success and survival, the Army invests the time and resources to train them with their cadets.

Similarly, while your athletes lives don't hang in the balance, you too can adapt the cutting edge strategies used by the Center for Enhanced Performance to create more mentally tough athletes who are ready to successfully battle on the playing fields.

For more information on the Army's Center for Enhanced Performance visit:

<http://www.dean.usma.edu/cep/>