



Have you ever taken charge of an organization that had a poor command climate? Whether it's a platoon or a division, changing the climate isn't easy and it takes time. So where do you begin?

If you want to change the climate, you have to start with the weather. To explain this analogy, let's look at how climate and weather are related in meteorological terms.

According to NASA's website, *"the difference between climate and weather is a measure of time."* Weather is what the conditions are over a short period of time; likewise, climate is how the atmosphere "behaves" over relatively a long period of time." So, just as weather conditions over a period of time describe the climate, our actions as commanders over a period of time define our command climate.

**ADRP 6-22 Army Leadership** describes climate as "how members feel about the organization and comes from shared perceptions about the unit's daily functioning. Climate affects the motivation and the trust Soldiers and Army Civilians feel for their team and leaders." *The responsibility for the unit's climate lies solely in the hands of the commander.* After bad leaders leave organizations and new ones assume command, changing a poor climate is a daunting task. There isn't a speech or command philosophy that will do the job; ultimately, it's the day-to-day actions and behaviors (i.e. the weather) of the new commander that work towards fostering a positive climate.

While I wish there was an exact list of things we can do to change the climate, no such list exists to the best of my knowledge. Therefore, I've compiled a list derived from leadership research, personal experiences, and conversations with my peers. Clearly, this is not a

prescriptive process; each organization is different and may warrant specific requirements. However, these general areas create a foundation for a leader to tailor his or her approach to making a unit more effective. The following 11 areas, in no particular order, frame an approach to creating “Leader-Made Climate Change.”

**1. Hold yourself accountable for every promise.** Commanders like to talk. We like to hear ourselves tell subordinates in meetings, formations, or behind closed doors, that we are going to perform this action, plan this type of event, or change this policy. Many times they are just words and lack follow-through on our part. After awhile, subordinates pick up on this, and similar to the boy who cried wolf, we are no longer taken seriously. If you say you are going to do something, hold yourself responsible for completing the task to the standard which you established. If you realize through analysis that it’s impossible, address it with your subordinates.

**2. Be absolutely clear about your expectations with others, to the point that they recite your words back to you (even if it is in jest).** When leaders are not clear, organizations spend time, effort, and energy attempting to “discover” what the commander really wants. Your subordinates should have no doubt of what you expect of them.

**3. Take responsibility for all of your mistakes and establish what recoverable and unrecoverable mistakes are for your subordinates.** Sometimes our egos make this difficult; however, addressing our mistakes in the presence of our subordinates lets them know that failure is just as much a part of the learning process as success. Furthermore, defining which mistakes are recoverable and which ones aren’t help them understand what their left and right limits are so that they may exercise initiative and accept prudent risk, both principles of mission command.

**4. Be Transparent.** Commanders aren’t the only ones in closed door sessions with inner circles, and very few conversations remain private. Being transparent is one way to ensure your messages always remain clear and consistent, and that you can be trusted.

**5. Spend time getting to know what motivates those who work for you.** Learning why your subordinates get up and come to work every day not only helps you understand how to motivate them, it also lets them know that you care about their well-being and development.

**6. Recognize Achievement.** Whether it’s public recognition or a hand-written note (see [Power of a Note](#)), recognizing achievement not only validates hard work in the minds of

your subordinates, it helps leaders set a standard that hard work is both appreciated and will be noticed.

**7. Be Present.** As leaders, we are extremely busy, and we love to multi-task. While a subordinate is briefing us or attempting to have a conversation, checking our email, reading the latest FRAGO, answering the blackberry, etc. sends the wrong signal and is rude. It shows that our interest in the people who work for us is superficial at best. When our subordinates are speaking to us, we need to maintain eye contact, pay attention to what they are saying, and watch their body language. Not only does it show respect, but it also helps us receive the *full* message from the sender.

**8. Stomp out the embers of the negative environment.** Whether its rumors, personnel, or procedures, we need to find those things that have the potential to “flame up” and shift the climate back towards one of a toxic nature. This is done through AARs, command climate surveys, and being present as a commander.

**9. Don’t make people wait.** While in leadership positions, we like to think we are the most important people in the world and that the unit couldn’t function without us; in actuality the majority of the work is done by those that work for us. Being late for meetings or making subordinates “stand-by” for 30-45 minutes is unacceptable. Every minute they wait is another counterproductive minute. If you are unable to make a scheduled event, do your best to quickly reschedule. If you are late, offer a *sincere* apology.

**10. Hold yourself to the same standards you enforce.** From fitness levels to ethics to family time, leaders must never give the appearance that the standards no longer apply to them.

**11. Keep looking in the mirror.** Remember that climate is all about feelings and perceptions. If you want to change the climate, you have to look in the mirror everyday and ask yourself “Did my actions today foster a positive climate?”

There is nothing “quick and easy” about this list, and while there are single steps we can take to change the weather forecast for a period of time, these must be done from the first day until the last one if we want to change the climate. Ideally, we want to hand the next commander a beach towel and sunscreen instead of an umbrella.

For more on this topic, I recommend reading:

[ADRP 6-22 Army Leadership](#)

[Developing an Effective Command Philosophy by Harry Garner](#)

[Command Climate by Joseph Doty and Joe Gelineau](#)

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