



by Casey & Courtney Dean

Listening to your Dad can be tough.

“What does he know?”

“Things are different now.”

“The Cold War Army had nothing on what we do now.”

But over time, as we gain experience, and by experience we mean all the times we woke up with hangovers, made poor life choices, or had kids of our own who wake up too early, we start coming to the realization that,

“Maybe Dad was right.”

Our Dad was an Armor officer for 21 years. He served during the height of the Cold War and deployed as a tank battalion S3 to Operation Desert Shield/Storm. He was in tactical and training units at the division level and below, focusing his career on ensuring tankers and cavalymen were trained and ready for war. Growing up around Armor posts in the US and Germany, he passed many timeless lessons to my brother and me about leading, training, and fighting in the Army. Though he’s forgotten more about being a mounted leader than we’ll ever know, there are a few lessons he’s passed on that we thought worth sharing with you.

Remember your place. There’s no room in the Army for politics. You can have your own opinions, but the UCMJ rightly forbids you for sharing those comments while in uniform or representing your position. The military is subordinate to civilian rule and our Commander-in-Chief will change every four to eight years. As leaders, you cannot show that you prefer one party to another or respect a civilian leader over others. When I was a Goldbar recruiter I worked in the office next to my Dad for four months. I once made a disparaging, snarky comment about a civilian senior leader on TV and he immediately shut it down. He pulled me aside and reminded me about Article 88 of the UCMJ and the importance of being apolitical. I quickly realized I wasn’t some knucklehead cadet anymore and now a professional.

Run it again, this time with feeling. Dad pulled this gem from one of his mentors and former bosses. As a young scout platoon leader preparing to fight a multi-faceted

insurgency in Iraq, I (incorrectly) didn't see the merit in what I deemed to be "boring" garrison life. I (foolishly) failed to see the value in the repetition of planning, preparing, executing, and assessing smaller level tasks such as small arms ranges, Stryker gunnery, recovery, maneuver...repeat. After taking counsel of my "plight" in Dad he quickly shut it all down. He knew the value in repetition, that the "mundane" and "lower-level" tactical tasks were what saved lives. He was right.

Focus on tough, realistic training. Taking care of your Soldiers means preparing them for combat. Dad is a fan of two leaders- General George Patton and Coach Bob Knight. Dad was a student manager/coach under Coach Knight at IU in the mid-'70s, including when the Hoosiers went undefeated and won the National Championship. Coach made practice so tough that players loved games for the break. That's what Dad taught us-resource and plan your training event so challenging it will live to Patton's adage, "a pint of sweat saves a gallon of blood." After years of reps on tank ranges and training areas of West Germany, he put it to practice in Desert Storm, then ensured we knew it.

Lifesaver walk. Several lessons he's passed on to us over the years were ones he learned, maybe even learned the hard way, like walking on the left of a senior officer. The lifesaver walk was one about making on the spot corrections through conversation and away from the troopers. If it's not an immediate threat, pull the leader off to the side and take a little walk to have a short (perhaps one-way) chat about their behavior, actions, attitude, etc. This can leave a lasting impact and show your team that you don't tolerate substandard work, but you're not a jerk either.

The Army is a people business. You can be the best at PT, tactics, and administration, but if you can't communicate and connect with your team, you're useless. Good leaders are good communicators, both written and verbal. They understand that people make up our profession and those people are motivated in different ways and have many things going on in their lives. It can be tough to remember in the drive to accomplish the mission, but it's better for our Army in the long run.

No one takes better care of your career than you. Take advice with a grain of salt and look out for your interests (without being a squeaky wheel). Know your strengths and weaknesses and build a network of seniors, peers, and juniors to bounce career ideas off of; but know in the end you're the one making the decisions and it's your career. Understand you and your family's priorities and know that at the end of your Army career they will be the only thing left.

Despite retiring from the Army almost 20 years ago, our Dad continues to share his timeless leadership lessons. Part of the reason is that he understands the importance of communication, the other part is that my brother and I tend to learn lessons the hard way. Hopefully, Dad's lessons will help you be a better soldier and leader. Because as we wrote this, we realized, "maybe dad was right."

Thanks again Dad for your leadership!

Casey is an armor officer with most of his time spent in armored formations. He's currently rowing the basement of the Pentagon. Connect with him on Twitter @Casey_D120 or casey.dean21[at]gmail.com.

Courtney is an armor officer with a cavalry and reconnaissance background. He's currently the brigade operations officer in the 157th Infantry Brigade and not in a basement. Connect with him on Twitter @CJDeano or courtney.j.dean[at]gmail.com.

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