



By: CSM Mike Burke and CSM Marcus Brister

“Next week, we will have an LPD on NCOERs...” said the command sergeant major, receiving a combination of eye rolls and long exhales during the training meeting. True to form, the following week, an unprepared Staff Sergeant gave a cookie cutter, death-by-PowerPoint brief on NCOERs while leaders stared at the clock waiting to get back to work.

When the Army combines the two things it must do well, training and leadership, it often falls flat on its face! Too often, the vignette above is the norm rather than the exception. Leaders must devote time, effort, and planning into Leader Professional Development (LPD).

The goal of an LDP program is to develop leaders through a formalized process. A good strategy and professionally executed blocks of instruction add value to the formation, otherwise it may just be wasting leaders' precious time.

Below is a guide to establishing a successful LPD program as well as tips to make each session worth your leaders' time.

Develop the Program

Step 1: Plan with the end state in mind. Understand the higher headquarters' mission, the commander's intent, and the strengths and weaknesses of the unit. These will guide the LPD program to a desired end state or organizational goal. LPDs should not be a short term fix like a "safety stand down." They should transform a unit over time.

Step 2: Identify the Audience. The phrase "LPD for platoon sergeants and above" is a term for lazy leaders. Knowledge and experience vary by position and rank. Taking the time to cater education to respective audiences is more effective than teaching large groups with broad brushstrokes.

Step 3: Develop the plan. Putting pen to paper is the fun part. Identify topics, instructors, and products. Ideas and resources are everywhere, and great leaders never plan in a bubble. Mind map with leaders of various ranks to get an outside perspective. All LPD plans should reach down echelons for a holistic approach.

Step 4: Sell the Plan. Getting the buy-in from all echelons is essential for success. Senior leadership will devote resources and protect LPDs if they value them. Subordinates will invest time and put effort into improvement when they understand the "why." Every LPD session, if run well, is an opportunity to sell the plan and instill passion to continuously improve the program.

10 Tips for LPD Success:

1-Bring in passionate teachers. People with true passion will be subject matter experts. Subordinate and higher units may have talented instructors. A LPD may not be the best place to develop a leader's teaching ability!

2-Always do a rehearsal, preferably 48 hours in advance to have time to fix issues. Staff duty personnel make an excellent and diverse test audience.

3-Provide tools and resources during LPDs the people can bring back to their workplace. Share products on the spot rather than, "we'll email this out after" and having it get lost in the inbox.

4-Teach leaders outside your rank structure. Officer professional development should not be exclusively taught by officers and vice versa.

5-Get outside a class room and find a relevant setting. For example, a clinic or wellness center is an excellent location for a LPD on medical readiness.

6-Make it interactive. People have different learning methods, very few learn best by just listening to a topic for 50 minutes. This practice is even more important for distance learning.

7-Use doctrine as well as other resources. There are plenty of resources out there that subordinates, peers, and civilians have or can access.

8-Start with group PT and then go into an hour long LPD. This schedule prevents midday conflicts with other events. Make every effort to avoid canceling or postponing LPDs.

9-Get feedback. Send a personal email a week after the event to a few members of the audience. This will get more candid feedback than a group AAR after the event.

10-Evaluate the results. Are leaders developing? For example, a LPD on the writing and processing of awards should result in fewer late awards with a decrease in the number being sent back for errors.

Leader development is one of the few things that will outlive a leader's time in position. All leaders have an obligation to transfer knowledge to subordinates to continuously develop both them and the organization. If done correctly, an LPD program's trickle down effect enhances the Soldiers, the unit, and the Army.

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