



By Timothy Russell

Throughout my time in command, I faced numerous leadership challenges both tactically and while in garrison. I've experienced everything from minor to major UCMJ actions through the unfortunate situation of dealing with the loss of a soldier within my formation. While I recognize every command is different, and every organization has its unique challenges and expectations, I'm sharing my leadership takeaways from command in hopes of helping others lead well. I provide my insights to help you think about where to start when you arrive in your new position. For those currently in command, this list can serve as an azimuth check on your own organization.

- **Your company is now your family.**

“Treat the janitor with the same respect as you treat the CEO”

- Create a culture of trust and honesty within your unit. Your success is grounded in the culture you create within your ranks. Treat every soldier from new private to senior leader with the utmost dignity and respect. Get to know your soldiers, personally in terms of what motivates them, where they came from, how they grew up, and their personal goals/aspirations. Their responses may provide you with insight on how to adjust your leadership style to maximize effectiveness and motivate subordinates to accomplish the most difficult and complex tasks.
- Introduce yourself to every soldier and NCO who arrives at your organization. This effort shows that you care and are invested in their success while under your command. The impact of a 3-5 minute discussion with a new soldier is limitless.
- Live your open-door policy. Create a culture of trust, and let your Soldiers know that you care and you are approachable. Never create an environment where your soldiers are afraid to talk to you. BE the approachable commander.
- Foster a climate in which people never want to leave your organization. Invest the same level of care for those soldiers who decide to transition to the civilian world, as you do those who decide to reenlist. The concern for all is the mark of a true professional.
- When your unit has downtime or a break in “Army” activities, take advantage and be human with your company (Family). For example, set up a video game tournament in the company area after a grueling NTC rotation (The current generation of soldiers loves Call-of-Duty, NBA 2K, and Madden).

- **SHARP/Equal Opportunity**

“Perception is reality...Say it again, Perception is reality!”

- SHARP is a highly visible topic within our ranks, and it should be. Our force and our formations have no room for people who violate another soldier or for those who turn a blind eye to the actions of a perpetrator. The culture you set within your formation will have a trickle-down effect in terms of the perception of SHARP, and how or when your subordinates report and inform you of such incidents.
- During mandatory training events never undermine the information that is being presented. This type of action further divides us and will fester throughout your organization, severing the bonds you create in addition to losing respect that you can never earn back.
- Reporting incidents of sexual harassment and/or assault, regardless of how minor you may think they are, aids in fostering a safe environment for all soldiers. Your failure to **immediately** report such incidents will undoubtedly have severe consequences. These may or may not include the loss of your job and reputation, but also, potentially, the loss of a soldier’s life. Take these issues seriously.
- The Army’s People’s First Initiative is the priority. The majority of your challenges in Command are inherently people related. Make people a priority in your organization and watch your productivity grow.
- Think about Equal Opportunity at your level. Provide all soldiers, regardless of race, gender, religion, or even sexual orientation, the tools and the opportunity to succeed. Push all of your soldiers to be the very best that they can be, and advocate for them to attend career enhancing schools. Performance is unbounded by race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. Value performance over everything else to avoid the perception of any wrongdoing. Be fair in your assessment of all of your leaders and be fair and equitable in any disciplinary action you administer against them, as well.

- **Professional appearance and professional conduct...**

“The ability to READ THE ROOM is an important skill that is often neglected.”

- Self awareness is an obvious and expected trait of a successful commander. LIVE professionalism. Be the leader who peers and subordinates respect and speak highly of when you are NOT around. You will be amazed at how your soldiers will view you and their desire to brag about you to their peers in other organizations.
- Be yourself but understand where you are and the position you hold. Be confident but not arrogant when interacting with subordinates, peers, and superiors. Your ability to effectively communicate orally and through written documents will be evaluated daily by subordinates and superiors alike. Ensure you speak and write with clarity and correct grammar. Effective communication is one of the essential traits of a skilled and professional leader.

- **Never stop developing leaders...**

“Don’t Be Like Me, Be Better Than Me.”

- Invest in the development of your subordinates. If you prove you are committed to their success through your actions, they will do everything possible to make YOU successful. Send your NCOs to schools and never prioritize training over professional military education courses. As a recommendation, company commanders should

consider focusing on Squad Leader development and allowing their 1SG to mentor Platoon Sergeants, while Squad Leaders develop and mentor their Team Leaders. This method allowed me to assess my junior NCOs and evaluate their ability to develop their subordinates.

- Achieve “buy-in.” Training Meetings are important and should be a venue for all leaders to speak. In order to get the most out of the meeting, you should not be doing all of the talking. Allow leaders to offer insight on training and how to assess their subordinates.
- Subordinate leaders fill your shoes faster than you know it. Groom them to replace you. Be tough on them doctrinally and tactically, but friendly enough for them to feel comfortable coming to you with issues. I approached relationships with Platoon Leaders as a big brother little sibling dynamic. I was the big brother who didn’t want his siblings hanging out with him (think off-duty) but would always be there for them to coach them through challenges and share my experiences.

- **Know your job...**

“If you are going to fight, don’t lose”



- Be a Warfighter. Being proficient in your craft is the most important aspect of leading soldiers.
- Your position as a commander is based on your Soldiers perceptions of you. You will never know everything there is to know, but technology has changed all of that and the answers are at your fingertips.

I ALWAYS kept my iPad with me with doctrinal references loaded to quality check any planning or operational decisions I was concerned about, even as a rifle company commander in Afghanistan.

- It is OK to fail but it is not OK to be a failure. Your organization will fail at something. Your reaction and recovery indicates the level of resilience that exists in your organization. Create tough and realistic training that forces your organization to their breaking point.
- Speak in doctrinal terms when briefing or speaking in a group setting. This shows that you understand the tasks assigned to you, and creates shared understanding within the institutional framework. Know what the terms mean and what is the expected outcome.

For example:

Isolate? What is actually expected with the task to isolate? Can we achieve it? Should we request a task that achieves the commander's intent?

- As a maneuver leader, you MUST be well versed in maneuver tactics. Read doctrine and lean on your NCOs to fill the gaps where you have limited knowledge. Fight hard in training so you and your soldiers are ready to win the first fight.
- Master the Basics and avoid over complicating your plans. A simple plan boldly executed is better than a complex plan that never makes it past LD.

- **Property, Property, Property...**

"If I go to jail, I'm not going alone, and I will NOT be on the bottom bunk when we get there."

- Property accountability is vital to the success of any organization. Don't delegate the

responsibility of overseeing and managing this task to your XO or PLs. Force them to do their jobs, while maintaining oversight of property you have on-hand and ALL of the sub-components. You place yourself at risk if you fail to take the appropriate measures to ensure your arms room is operating according to Post, Army, and DoD regulations.

- Build a professional relationship with your supply section. They are surrounded by either 19 series or 11 series and may feel alone at times. Bring them into the family at all costs. They are the SMEs who will help protect you and explain the technical aspects of your Command Supply Discipline Program.
- Always ensure that the equipment you are responsible for is fully mission capable. If an item isn't serviceable, get it fixed or request to turn it in.

- **UCMJ....**

"When in doubt I don't use SWAG, I call JAG!"

- I preferred to get to work early and knock out required administrative tasks, which enabled me to spend quality time with my Soldiers and NCOs (The family). As a result, when my soldiers violated UCMJ, depending upon the offense, I would use "alternative measures to resolve the issue". For severe offenses, I contacted JAG and went through the steps to adjudicate the issue at hand. For minor infractions, I often resorted to my creativity and the "Art" of command to bring resolution.
- Don't be afraid to get rid of bad people. Ensure you are counseling them and they understand their duties and responsibilities and how they failed to meet the established standard.
- Anything UCMJ-related just call JAG. Get to know your representative and if you have

questions or questionable situations, call them.

- **Reputation Up, Down, Left, and Right...**

“All you have in this game (The Army) is your name and the reputation that is attached to it”

- Be a problem solver for both your subordinates and your superiors. From tactical issues, to garrison and external planning efforts, be a problem solver and refrain from adding to the problem. Take care not to create additional problems while attempting to solve current issues. Never provide input on a problem or issue without a solution. Become value-added by identifying a problem, developing a viable solution, and briefing the solution as a recommendation.
- Avoid hostile interactions with your peers and the battalion staff. We are all more successful when we work together. Be a team player and share products and information with your peers. This habit makes the organization better. Not to mention, who else are you going to vent to when you get frustrated with work?
- The staff works for your commander. Treat them with dignity and respect, they are there to provide assistance and to handle many of the administrative tasks your organization requires to operate.

This list is by no means all-encompassing and is merely designed to offer a few points that I learned during my time in command. I share this information in an effort to assist those who wrestle with potential focus areas and alleviate anxiety about assuming the mantle of command. Enjoy the time in command, live every day like it's your last, and cherish every single second of leading America's sons and daughters.



“Do Right, Fear No One!”

MAJ Timothy Russell is an Army Armor officer currently attending the USMC Command and Staff College. He previously served as a Project Warrior officer with assignment to the National Training Center (Scorpion Team) and as a Small Group Leader at the Maneuver Captains Career Course (MCCC). He has multiple deployments in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and has served in a variety of positions in both Armored and Stryker Brigade Combat Teams. He commanded Alpha Company, 4-17 IN BN, 1 SBCT, 1st Armored Division through a full gated training strategy culminating in a deployment in support of Operation Resolute Support in 2017.

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