



by Sam Allen

The recent release of the Battalion Commander selection list is exciting for all involved – certainly for those selected and those who have had some part in developing these proven leaders.

In the next few months, those selected in the previous year will begin to take command or assume responsibility of their battalions across the force. They will have spent months since selection forming their ideas and vision for how they intend to lead their formations. These inspired visions will be informed by their experiences and certainly by the COVID-induced environment.

Admittedly, these leaders have spent the last two years operating within this environment of social distancing, distributed meetings, and differing degrees of reduced workplace manning. While it is easy to assume the societal and organizational norms that have altered the ways we have led our organizations evolved over the last two years, certain aspects of command should never change.

As I look back on how I approached command and what leaders will soon face, I offer some advice on how to lead within the environment of a pandemic that will continue to affect how we interact with those we are charged to lead and develop.

- 1. Nothing replaces the authenticity of a firm handshake and eye-to-eye contact.** The fist-bump or elbow bump has become ubiquitous with the COVID environment, but in my mind, these exchanges come off as flippant or disingenuous. GEN Garrett is known to say that 'leadership is a contact sport' and this sentiment has been proven time again during my command. Trust is built most effectively when those being led see their leaders physically investing time and energy in them. This trust begins with a heartfelt handshake and a conversation in the motor pool.
- 2. Virtual meetings at the battalion level and below are less effective - do your best to limit them.** Body language plays a big part in determining if junior leaders understand your guidance. Likewise, the ability to truly have a dialogue with subordinates is significantly hindered with those who are not accustomed to working through these mediums.
- 3. Formations are still great ways to get your message across to the unit.** We ascribe to the thought that a units' culture is a product of those things that you tolerate and those that you reward. Recognizing individuals who have excelled in front of their subordinates, peers, and first-line supervisors is powerful. Additionally, using the opportunity to provide your thoughts on the purpose of what the unit is doing is best achieved in person. If you must reduce numbers within command guidance, do it at echelon but no lower than company level.
- 4. As leaders, managing risk is our bread and butter.** Risk to mission and risk to force calculus drives many of the decisions we make from prioritizing readiness and training to how you engage with the force. As a future battalion commander, you must take this risk calculus further into how you engage and build your team into the type of organization that is galvanized around your vision.

In short, command is a privilege that requires leaders to stay engaged within the physical domain. Leading from the front is never more important than it is now.

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