



by Brad Ruttman

It was very difficult to choose the one thing I wish I knew before taking command. After 8 years of operational and strategic level command, there are so many. However, there is one in particular that I never thought that I would say as a military member: to be the best leader you can possibly be, you have to see the best in people first.

For most in the military, we grow up in the tactical realm where we formulate “the way it should be” in our brain. The idea that someday, “when I’m in charge, I’m going to do it

right.” After actually taking command, we find out it’s really more complicated than we thought.

In Robert Coram’s [book](#), *Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War*, Coram talks about how Boyd would refer to people as “do-ers” or “be-ers.” People who get by on accomplishing things, and people who essentially get by on their personality. If you’re a psychology nut, it’s the clash between the choleric and the sanguine. Oftentimes young leaders will grow up thinking the “other guy” is the problem in their unit, and do and say things to discredit their way of doing business. Staunch followers of Boyd will often discredit the be-ers as kiss-ups and tactical failures, and label them as such when they get promoted farther and faster. There are definitely numerous examples of toxic versions of this throughout military history, but I have figured out that emotional intelligence (EQ) is the deciding factor in most of this personality divergence.

Now that I am in strategic-level command, I don’t see do-ers and be-ers anymore. I see two pieces of a puzzle that are important to unit-morale, and I have to appreciate them both. Becoming a unifier is an incredibly important role a commander must play. At the strategic level, creating dissention is one of the most toxic things a leader can do. Pitting groups against each other or saying publicly-discouraging things to the informal leader of a group shows low EQ on the leader’s part.

Competition should create itself.

A leader that intentionally creates competition will formulate an environment of distrust, and will sink morale by creating a culture of haves and have-nots.

Oftentimes, I observe my subordinates doing something and I assume the worst. Whether it be the troop that thinks they have COVID for the tenth time, or one that can’t get a task done expeditiously, I will lash out or say a disconcerting word and immediately regret it. Most times, that person is doing the best they can, or they are just projecting a personality that is different from mine. Employing a little EQ and some empathy, I realize I can be a better leader by assuming the best in that person and learning how to maximize their strengths, instead of focusing on their weaknesses.

Colonel Brad Ruttman is currently the Operations Group Commander for the 138th Fighter Wing.

Editor’s Note: In June, we asked our [From the Green Notebook](#) community a simple but profound question: What’s the one thing you wish you would have known before you started

your last assignment? This week, we are pleased to share the nuggets of wisdom leaders have learned with the hope that it doesn't have to be relearned by someone else the hard way.

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)
-  [Pin it](#)
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)