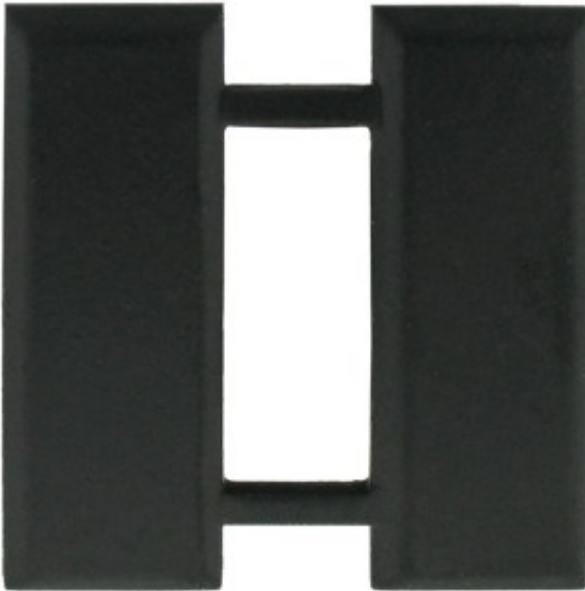


## Plan, Anticipate, and Respond: Reflections on Company Command



by Jakob Hutter

Two months ago, I relinquished command of my company, ending a chapter in one of the most fulfilling, humbling, and finest experiences I have had in my military career. This included an eXportable Combat Training Capability (XCTC) exercise in Camp Roberts, California, and a Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

When I first took command of the Forward Support Company in August of 2020, I accepted this responsibility knowing that it would be a dynamic and challenging experience. This included ensuring we were able to support the Aviation Battalion with its requirements to be successful, and also be able to take care of the range of activities in the company while taking care of Soldiers and the [stressors](#) of the COVID-19 pandemic. Having previously served as the Executive Officer for the company, I had the benefit of understanding the pulse of the organization.

In this opportunity to reflect on my own experiences in what I believe was a successful Company Command, I hope this can resonate with others who are currently in company command or plan on taking on this endeavor.

Before I accepted the guidon, I prepared by thinking over what I wanted to accomplish in this position, continuing my [reading plan](#) to include reading [Taking the Guidon](#) and a variety of regulations. Additionally, asking for advice and guidance from those that were in company command or had completed it. Preparing this way helped shape my command philosophy by focusing on four main objectives, which include: 1) providing proactive

logistics support, 2) taking care of Soldiers and their Families, 3) developing Leaders, and 4) empowering the team.

### **Proactive Logistics Support**

A [Forward Support Company](#) is dynamic in its capabilities. As the senior logistics officer in the battalion, understanding this purpose alongside the [principles of sustainment](#) is essential in maintaining combat power, enabling operational reach, and providing the supported unit with endurance.

In my command philosophy, I communicated to my team that I wanted us to provide proactive logistic support to our battalion. This required that we deliberately plan, anticipate, and respond effectively to ensure that we could maximize the battalion's effectiveness. As the commander, building that relationship with the other commanders and battalion staff allowed me to effectively coordinate this effort. Sometimes we were successful, other times, we were not. But overall, I believe that in our efforts to deliberately train and execute our tasks, we were successful in allowing the battalion to succeed.

A commander's responsibility is to generate readiness. Our major training events, an XCTC and JRTC rotation, provided unique opportunities that many in my company were able to face for the first time. I understood that I required honest input and feedback from my team to plan our training at the company, platoon, squad, and individual levels. Our team was able to build trust that improved our readiness and allowed us to accomplish our taskings at these events, even with the challenges and hurdles we faced. Due to this foundation of trust and honesty, my team was able to conduct proactive logistics allowing us to operate smoothly behind the scenes to support immediate concerns and plan effectively for future problems.

### **Soldier and Family Care**

When I wrote [Strength in Inclusion](#), I noted that each member of the team joined for any number of reasons, and those did not include feeling excluded, unwelcomed, and undervalued. I understood the critical need to be present to effectively lead. I believe for the first few months in command was an improvement that I needed to work on. While I would check-in with Soldiers and ask how they were doing, in retrospect these conversations were surface level or that the overall response was that all was well.

When I wasn't around Soldiers, I was more at my desk, feeling bogged down in administrative tasks. Thanks to some conversations with my First Sergeant on my approach

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and how I could improve, I knew that I needed to be more deliberate and conduct [leadership by wandering around](#) (LBWA). I was able to make incremental improvements that allowed me to better connect and communicate with my Soldiers and received better feedback that helped improve our organization.

Through this, one of the impacts was that I was able to more positively be there for Soldiers. This, however, can be challenging in staying up to date on Soldiers lives between training events, and I made a point during our monthly leadership calls to let me know if there were any issues facing our Soldiers.

When finding out that a Soldier had experienced a loss in their family, about to have surgery, celebrated the birth of a new child, or any other life experience, I wanted them to know that the company had their back in supporting them by getting them a card signed by everyone. Some Soldiers were greatly impacted by this; I was happy that this was a way I could invest in taking care of Soldiers.

I wanted to infuse predictability with our Soldiers when they came to drill. This is important as Soldiers sacrifice a weekend away from their loved ones to train with us, some traveling hours to attend. I wanted to ensure that they were getting their money's worth by coming to drill and that they were able to do the job they signed up for. To infuse this predictability, I wanted to be transparent with my team on what was being communicated to me and ensure that Soldiers at the lowest level were able to understand how they were going to spend their time. Doing so I felt helped reduce the friction Soldiers may feel and actually value the time they were taking in showing up.

### **Leadership Development**

While developing subordinate leaders can present unique [challenges](#) due to limited interactions and time constraints, I wanted to deliberately build a leadership development program that could benefit my team's personal and professional growth.

In this effort, I intended to build that commitment when I conducted my initial [counseling](#) with my team by communicating and discussing my vision for the company, my expectations, and how that individual could contribute to the success of our organization.

When I checked-in with their progress, I would try to block off some time to have a conversation with them to see how they were doing and to discuss their progress so far. However, I could have been more effective in my follow-ups with my team to revisit and see how they are improving and discuss any limitations or constraints they may have and write

the highlights down to track their progress over time.

Another aspect of my leader development program that I wanted to create was a lifelong learning mindset. I wanted my leadership team to take ownership in their responsibilities, and to set the example for their subordinates to emulate. By encouraging a lifelong learning mindset, I wanted to establish a foundation where they each could appreciate any challenges we faced and see them as opportunities for personal growth, thereby improving the unit's overall strength. For me, this required taking the necessary risk of being comfortable and allowing for failure (as long as we deliberately worked to mitigate the issues from becoming habitual).

With our major training events in our XCTC and JRTC, the hard work and dedication they had in accomplishing paid off, and personally have been some of the best training I have received so far in my career.

Overall, having this deliberate leadership development program dedicated to improving Soldiers personally and professionally was rewarding as a leader. I not only saw their own growth, but it helped make us into a stronger team that allowed for open communication and dialogue that helped make the unit effective for the long-term.

### **Empower the Team**

Another element of my command philosophy that I wanted to positively impact the culture of the organization was to empower leaders to think outside the box in order to improve the company. I wanted to push the team to think beyond thinking and saying "we've always done it this way" when faced with new ways to improve the effectiveness of the team. With the diversity of knowledge, skills, and abilities that we had at our disposal, the ability to question our processes and be open to change based on our experiences was important for me to communicate.

For instance, based on feedback from my team, we conducted a company planning sync. We put butcher paper around a room, highlighted the key objectives and tasks for each training event, and included space for each platoon to provide their feedback. Then, we had Soldiers pair up to spend a few minutes at each board to include what they needed to accomplish in their platoon for that training event. This provided my team additional insights on training our Soldiers wanted to conduct for the calendar year to meet our objectives and allowed Soldiers to "buy-in" to our collective training plan.

For me, this required that I actively practiced servant-leadership principles and was

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authentic with others to create an environment for them to work autonomously and be themselves. I think this allowed them to take ownership of their responsibilities as leaders and allowed our company to optimize our training through each month as we were able to have.

In addition to empowering innovation, I wanted each person that was part of my company to have a sense of pride in that they enjoyed coming to drill to play a part in the team's success. I personally invested, after soliciting feedback from my team, to set out to design and develop a company challenge coin.

Once received, I remember awarding the first two coins within my company, wanting to create a big impact with my Soldiers on my vision for awarding the coin, but more importantly to recognize the accomplishments of the Soldiers receiving them. Upon leaving command, the remaining coins are now with the new company commander, in hopes that the coins can continue to serve their purpose of recognizing Soldiers.

All things considered, my time as a company commander was a very satisfying and fulfilling experience that I will never forget. As I settle into my new assignment, I look forward to making a positive impact by taking these lessons learned over the past two years. For those looking at taking company command, I can assure you that you will have a lasting impact on the Soldiers you lead. While your command will be both stressful and anxiety-filled, it will also be filled by a fun and rewarding experience for your career. As I was told when I first accepted the guidon, if you take care of your Soldiers, they will do wonders for you. Best of luck!

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