

The Crucible Experience – L200 Essay

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MAJ Ed Hardy, SG4B

My service in the Army has provided its share of negative and positive experiences. Some of these events have influenced who I have become today. A couple of months ago I initiated a 360 evaluation of my time in command. After receiving its results I concluded that no experience in the Army has proven to challenge me more than taking command of a Reconnaissance Troop. I found out that my social skills, self-awareness, and leadership style had been placed under the microscope for all to examine.

The first point I will elaborate on to explain how this experience has influenced me as an organizational leader is emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman argues that social skills and self-awareness are capabilities of emotional intelligence which defines our “ability to manage ourselves and our relationships effectively”.<sup>1</sup> These capabilities are composed of competencies such as developing others, building bonds, and communication and the ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and weaknesses.<sup>2</sup>

The second point is leadership style. Leadership styles influence organizational climate differently. Goleman argues that those who set high standards of performance, also known as “pacesetters”, tend to have a negative influence on organizational climate.<sup>3</sup> The third point is leading an organization through change. After analyzing the two first points and using Kotter’s model for Leading Change, it clarified how my shortfalls had a direct impact on my ability to lead change within my organization.<sup>4</sup> My Crucible Experience taking command of a Reconnaissance Troop helped me re-examine components of my Emotional Intelligence, my leadership style, and my ability to lead change.

I always have been a firm believer that leaders must work to develop their subordinates. After taking command and while I was training the Troop in preparation for deployment, I realized that taking the time

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Leadership That Gets Results* (Harvard Business Review, March-April 2000); excerpt reprinted in US Command and General Staff College, *L200 Book of Readings* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, August 2008), 80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Yvonne Doll and Billy Miller, *Leading and Making a Transformational Change in the US Army*; excerpt reprinted in US Command and General Staff College, *L100 Book of Readings* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, August 2008), 59.

to conduct Officer Professional Development sessions was difficult to achieve especially when striking a balance in between time spent at work and with loved ones. Therefore, the majority of my feedback and guidance on their performance was given during their monthly counseling. When we deployed, the parameters changed drastically. There was not much time for formal counseling session. But what I soon realized is that I was focusing on the mission and not on taking time to give them formal feedback on their performance. I thought that through our daily interactions, I was giving them a sense on what I thought of them. I have learned that even the most informal feedback is well worth the time spent in a formal setting. I have also learned that my perception is sometimes blurred and needs the help of a trusted third party, like a first sergeant or a peer, to help see reality for what it is.

I also discovered that building relationships was another area I thought was short. Building bonds has always been for me something that takes time because I am not the out-going type. I am not the kind of person who shakes everybody's hand at parties. I am naturally not the one who seeks to extend his network of relationships. This was a limitation I had to contend with especially when interacting with Family Readiness Groups and with soldiers. I discovered that if I had another chance I would not be as timid in connecting with soldiers and their spouses and that leaders are required to personally connect with their subordinates and families.

I discovered that my communication skills could be further developed. Although those around me recognized that I was a competent and strong leader, they would have preferred more communication from my part. I have found out that leading by example is good, but communicating and inculcating those positive traits is better and more productive to developing subordinates.

Before taking command, I thought I had a fairly accurate sense for what my strengths and limitations were. After being close to soldiers and reading the results of my 360 evaluation report, I realized that my limitations were more obvious than I originally thought. I needed to take a bold and fresh new look at myself, understand my shortfalls, and work on improving myself.

My Crucible Experience was taking command of a Reconnaissance Troop because it helped me re-examine my leadership style. Goleman defines “pacesetter” as “one who sets extremely high performance standards and exemplifies them. He is obsessive about doing things better and faster, and he asks the same from everyone around him”.<sup>5</sup> Although I saw and accepted everyone’s shortcomings, I never compromised my standards. I knew what right looked like and I expected my subordinates to do just that. My subordinates needed some coaching once in a while, but nevertheless the expected outcome remained the same. This was most evident in my expectations for accurately accounting for government property.

I established for my platoon leaders formats for tracking sensitive items such as weapons, sights, and communication equipment. This format was very detailed. This report was to be signed by platoon leaders and platoon sergeants and returned prior to the end of the month. Every time a new piece of equipment was issued, they were supposed to report its accountability on that sheet. Along with this report, platoon leaders were expected to sign their platoon hand-receipts every month. Since I was required to sign for my Troop’s property, I was going to expect the same from my platoon leaders. Because we were in theater, we received many new items that were difficult to accurately track. We were all expected to keep an accurate account or someone was going to end up paying out of their pocket if anything came up missing. I decided that we were going to avoid such situations by maintaining accurate hand-receipts and logs. It was my goal to inculcate to my subordinates the importance of being good custodians of government property.

The workload soon proved to be so heavy that platoon leaders wished they could refuse new pieces of equipment in order to avoid the increasingly difficult responsibility of accounting for it. I then realized that I too often used a pacesetter and coercive approach and that I needed take a closer look at alternating my leadership styles in order to positively influence the climate within my troop. I discovered that it

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Leadership That Gets Results*, 86.

would have been more productive to adopt a democratic or authoritative leadership style as Goleman defines in order to get a more collaborative response instead of a strictly compliant attitude.<sup>6</sup>

Also my Crucible Experience helped me re-examine my ability to lead change. Among Kotter's eight-step model to Lead Change, creating a guiding coalition and generating short-term wins is where I believe I could have capitalized more on.<sup>7</sup> Under the previous command, there was no accurate record keeping. Therefore, the process of establishing and enforcing a time-consuming reporting system was difficult to say the least. Although all understood the necessity of this, the sole effort to enforce this system seemed to have exclusively come from me. I understand that in the face as such a task, building a strong coalition with my executive officer and first sergeant would have been more effective. It is difficult to produce short term wins in a tangible form except to say that no equipment was ever lost. The end result is that the system that I put in place worked but the path to change would have been smoother.

My experience helped me re-examine components of my Emotional Intelligence, my leadership style, and my ability to lead change. I understand now that social skills and self-awareness are fundamental capabilities that I will need to develop if I wish to be a successful organizational leader. I have also come to the conclusion that I must more frequently adopt different leadership styles which foster a positive climate and that leading change requires a strategy based on mutual trust and understanding.

### Bibliography

Goleman, Daniel. *Leadership That Gets Results*. Harvard Business Review, March-April 2000. Excerpt reprinted in US Command and General Staff College, *L200 Book of Readings*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, August 2008.

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Leadership That Gets Results*, 80.

<sup>7</sup> Yvonne Doll and Billy Miller, *Leading and Making a Transformational Change in the US Army*, 59.

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