

On March 10, 2008 my former spouse told me that she wanted a divorce. In the next few weeks I learned of her adultery and the depth and duration of her feelings that led to this day. This night was a crucible experience as my every thought for several months was focused on what I had done wrong. Warren & Thomas define a crucible experience as, “a trial and a test, a point of deep self-reflection that forced them to question who they were and what mattered to them. It required them to examine their values, question their assumptions, hone their judgment. And, invariably, they emerged from the crucible stronger and more sure of themselves and their purpose-changed in some fundamental way.”¹ This experience forced me to reexamine some of my beliefs including my definitions of success, the value of family, and my life priorities on a macro level. As an organizational level leader, this experience will influence my perceptions of unit climate, the example I set for subordinates, and the way I interact with my superiors. The purgatory of emotions and hurt are not what makes this event a crucible experience for me, rather it is the realizations after deep reflection and their personal impacts on a father, husband, and leader.

My definition of success prior to this night was based on my success as an officer in the Army. I had married another Army Officer that initially shared my ambitions and goals. Three children proved too difficult when coupled with our shared visions so she resigned her commission and focused on our children. I continued to focus my efforts in my job performance in the pursuit of success. After commanding a tank company in Iraq, commanding a Headquarters Company upon redeployment, and a nominative selection for a program called Project Warrior, I felt I was achieving my benchmarks for success. I moved out of our house in April of 2008 and for the first time in my life felt an overwhelming sense of failure. Despite relative success as an officer, I found my marriage had deteriorated to the point of divorce and I didn't even see it coming.

Success in my career came at a cost and most certainly did not equate to success in life. I learned then that my belief in success was false.

Prior to March of 2008, I thought of myself as an officer and a family man and spoke of the value of family to my soldiers. That self-perception gave me a sense of pride. In the following months I realized that I paid lip service to the notion of being a family man. There was always a good reason for not coming home in time to bathe our children, for not being able to take them to the library, or for showing up late to their soccer practices. I visited my parents shortly after my divorce and looked through albums containing photos of events within my extended family that I didn't even know about. I felt so hypocritical that I touted myself as a family man, yet I didn't know the way my children's off-post doctor's office. It took a divorce for me to realize that I had in fact little belief in the value of family.

Prior to early 2008, my priorities were self-centered and lacked a macro-level perspective. A quick scan of my Officer Evaluation Support Forms over the last several years were composed mostly of training, maintenance, educational, and personal goals. There was always a small blurb on them that read, "...accomplish all of this and still have fun with my family" or "...while still focusing on family time". I realized afterwards that I only put effort into family vacations during block leave. I had three children and as I looked back on the previous nine years, I realized that beyond their college savings, my priorities did not include them. Only after a divorce and much thought did this become apparent.

While I learned some hard lessons following my divorce, the experience will undoubtedly influence my view of unit climate as an organizational level leader. I suspect that there are many ambitious officers that fall into some of the same pitfalls as I. These pitfalls may have been shaped by unit climate factors such as group norms. The, "implicit standards and values that evolve in working groups, such as the particular

norm of 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay'² certainly have an impact. As a field grade officer and organizational level leader, I feel it important to get out of the office and see if a climate of "mission over family" exists.

As my view of unit climate is shaped by my divorce experience, so will the example I set for subordinates with respect to valuing family time. As an organizational leader, some may view my rank, position, or even relationship with senior officers as success. It is normal to emulate actions in order to achieve similar success or at the very least to gain approval. It is important for senior leaders to understand the impact of their actions on subordinates. I can hardly expect subordinates within an organization to value family if I don't set an example. I will make it a point to manage my family time and life as I continue to manage my career and job.

Finally, this experience has influenced the way I will interact with my superiors as an organizational level leader with respect to family. I feel it equally important to advise my superiors of these potential hazards should their organizations show indicators of this type of culture. As organizational level leaders it is important to not only inform our superiors but to also advise as we generate options for them. As with the example that I set, they too set an example that either stresses their value in the family or the opposite.

The night my former spouse informed me of her intent to divorce was a crucible experience for me. It was the catalyst that forced me to analyze my beliefs, draw conclusions, and ultimately influence me as an organizational level leader. The lessons and influences are a result of a deep self-reflection and caused me to reexamine my beliefs. As a result of examining my definition of success, my value of family, and the priorities in my life, I have a different perspective. Additionally, I feel that as an organizational level leader, the experience of reflection, not the divorce itself, will influence my perceptions of unit climate, the example I set for subordinates, and the way I interact with my superiors.

Works Cited

1. Warren G. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas, *Crucibles of Leadership*, Harvard Business Review at Large, September 2002, P. 39-40

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Crucible Essay

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February 11, 2010