

Try the TEAM Principle

By Captain Chris S. Richie, U.S. Marine Corps

Training, empowering, acknowledging, and mentoring are the tools that leaders must use to retain service members.

We must wake up and pay close attention to what our ex-service members are saying. The results of a recent Department of Defense study should strike a chord with every military leader. The top reasons for service members leaving the military in 2000 were lack of confidence in leaders, lack of job challenge, lack of responsibility, and lack of recognition. Leaders who scrutinize these concerns and institute basic leadership fundamentals can reduce significantly the voluntary separations of our service members.

How can leaders persuade someone to continue to serve? Before answering this question, we must understand that leadership is both an art and a science. The art of leadership eludes definition, but we can study leadership by exploring the actions of great military leaders such as Marine Lieutenant General Lewis "Chesty" Puller, who possessed unquestionable integrity and the personal respect of his Marines. Not every leader will have the charisma of General Puller, the force of character of General George Patton, the relentless brilliance of Admiral Ernest J. King, or the singular achievements of General Douglas MacArthur. Any leader, however, can apply the scientific aspects of leadership.

Those leaders who continuously train, empower, acknowledge, and mentor (something I have coined the TEAM principle) best exhibit an understanding of the scientific aspect of leadership. I learned the value of the TEAM principle in 1997 when I was given two weeks to prepare a junior crew of Marines for a major exercise and combat evaluation. A leader blessed with natural charisma or a forceful personality instinctively can motivate his subordinates, but the rest of us can be equally effective through training, empowering, acknowledging, and mentoring our subordinates. Furthermore, application of the TEAM principle can address many of the concerns that create disillusionment among many of today's service members.



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Train

Today's leaders must foster a climate of continuous training. In an environment where responsibilities have been increasing while the numbers of personnel have been decreasing, many leaders have grown reluctant to send subordinates on temporary assigned duty for training. Too often, they rationalize their actions by saying that the individual is far too valuable to the command to be lost for such an extended time. In spite of their perceived value to the organization, subordinates will become disillusioned if not given opportunities to grow by attending schools. Although directed to do so in Marine Corps doctrine, most Marine leaders do not provide enough training, ultimately resulting in a Marine's failure to progress. *Fleet Marine Force Manual-1* identifies the importance of training and the relationship of training to war fighting:

Training is the key to combat effectiveness. Commanders at each echelon must allot subordinates sufficient time and freedom to conduct the training necessary to achieve proficiency at their levels.¹

Service members will not become proficient solely through schools, exercises, and professional military education. They also must continuously study their military

occupational specialties. Leaders must foster a climate of constant learning to promote growth and job satisfaction.

Not only is training subordinates the right thing to do, but it also produces benefits such as increased proficiency, knowledge, confidence, morale, and challenge. The second most mentioned reason for service members leaving the military last year was that their jobs were not challenging enough. If leaders take the time to train subordinates, then hold them accountable for new tasks and responsibilities, the result will be an added challenge to the subordinate's job. In addition, when leaders encourage professional growth, job satisfaction increases, which motivates subordinates to remain in service. Failure to train subordinates, on the other hand, can result in terrible consequences such as their inability to accomplish what is expected of them. World War II German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel believed that "the best form of welfare for the troops is first-class training, for this saves unnecessary casualties."²

Subordinates cannot be challenged or given greater responsibilities until properly trained. I applied the training aspect of the TEAM principle during an exercise in 1997 by building a training guide with a test on each function the Marines were to perform during a combat evaluation. A computer program also was built to simulate the exercise, which the detachment



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completed several times. Not only did this challenge the Marines, but everyone agreed that the simulation and training guide were major factors in the detachment’s ultimate success in achieving a near-perfect grade. Leaders must ensure that the training is useful, relevant, and applicable to a subordinate’s growth and job proficiency. If leaders take the time to design such training, subordinates will respond to the challenge.

Empower

Empowerment means giving official authority or legal power to subordinates. Through empowerment, leaders reveal their trust in subordinates. Trusting someone’s judgment will have an enormous impact on his desire to prove the leader correct. A subordinate will not grow until given responsibilities greater than those required by his current rank. For example, if a leader treats a sergeant like a sergeant, that is likely all he will ever be. If the leader empowers the sergeant with the responsibilities of a staff sergeant, then that is what he will strive to become. Many junior Marines agree. In an article in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, Corporal Zachary Martin writes that “failure to give responsibility to NCOs [non-commissioned officers] produces NCOs who are indeed unworthy of responsibility.”³

The benefits of empowering subordinates are immeasurable because empowerment enhances morale by increasing the individual’s identity within a group. As a result, initiative and mutual trust will become welcomed side effects. Individ-

uals always will do their job, but they will perform tasks and assignments with more enthusiasm and initiative for a leader they trust. *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6* (MCDP-6) discusses mutual trust as a cornerstone for cooperation:

A senior trusts subordinates to carry out the assigned missions competently with minimal supervision, act in consonance with the overall intent, report developments as necessary, and effect the necessary coordination. Subordinates meanwhile trust that the senior will provide the necessary guidance and will support them loyally and fully, even when they make mistakes.

Trust must be earned. Leaders who empower their subordinates demonstrate their trust in them. Subordinates who unhesitatingly take on new responsibilities make clear their belief in their leaders. Too many leaders are afraid to apply the simple principle of empowerment. Empowering subordinates should not be feared, but practiced regularly.

The third most cited reason for service members leaving the military was that their leaders had failed to place them in positions of responsibility. If subordinates are empowered, their job satisfaction increases. They have more responsibility, they are challenged, and they want to stay in the organization. Failure to empower subordinates may not result in a failure to accomplish a specific mission. However, the leader who stifles the growth and initiative of his personnel will also stifle their interest in serving their country.

Unfortunately, too many leaders want to keep power to themselves, disfranchising their subordinates in the process. Many leaders fear empowerment because they are afraid that their subordinates will make mistakes. Consequently, leaders fail to delegate and thus create unhappy personnel. Leaders who empower tentatively create a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, they expect the subordinates to fail, and they often do. The leaders have laid the groundwork for failure by undermining the self-confidence of subordinates. Leaders must embrace empowerment. Their confidence in their subordinates is the leadership trait that will enable subordinates to grow.

Leaders must also exercise judgment when delegating power because people will handle additional authority in

many different ways. Then-Secretary of Defense William Cohen quoted President Abraham Lincoln at the 1999 Naval Academy graduation: “Nearly all men can handle adversity, but if you want to test a person’s character, give him power.” During the 1997 exercise, I empowered my Marines by splitting the crew into three sections and placing a sergeant in charge of each section. I told the sergeants that they would accomplish our mission because they were knowledgeable, motivated, and outstanding leaders. Through empowerment, these sergeants met the challenge and handled themselves and their Marines superbly.

Acknowledge

Acknowledging subordinates is the third element of the TEAM principle. Acknowledgment is not only thanking individuals for their contributions but also noticing them. Acknowledging subordinates is not accomplished solely by awarding them with medals that usually are presented long after their contribution has been made. A leader should take time on a daily basis to shine the spotlight on others. A leader should not assume that a meritorious mast given at the end of several months of performance will take care of this aspect of the TEAM principle. Dr. Wes Roberts writes that leaders should “be generous with small tokens of appreciation; they will multiply in returned loyalty and service.”⁵ Good leaders acknowledge their subordinates continuously by thanking them for their hard work. If a subordinate is

misguided or needs assistance, then good leaders will provide direction or find someone to help.

Most important, acknowledging subordinates means that the leader must listen. The importance of leaders leaving their offices to make personal contact with their people cannot be overstated. More than ever in this age of technology, leaders must make personal contact with their subordinates. Leaders cannot substitute e-mail and voice mail for leadership. Leaders who listen to their subordinates find out what their people are thinking and, not infrequently, come upon better ways of doing things. Leaders also must be humble enough to accept the possibility of learning better ways to accomplish goals or objectives.

The fourth reason for service members leaving the military last year was that they were not recognized enough for their dedication and importance to the organization. If leaders take the time to listen to and acknowledge their people, subordinates will have increased feelings of self-worth and their individual value to the organization. In addition, when formally recognized, subordinates learn to appreciate the value that their leaders place on hard work. Subordinates learn to connect effort and sacrifice with recognition. Once a subordinate has reached a level of self-actualization and believes that he will be appreciated for his efforts, he will be motivated to remain in service.

Leaders who fail to engage or acknowledge their subordinates set up a devastating cycle of failure. James Kouzes makes the following observation in a book about the challenge of leadership: "People repeat behavior that is rewarded, avoid behavior that is punished, and drop or forget behavior that produces neither result."⁶ I applied the acknowledge aspect of the TEAM principle during the exercise in 1997 by approaching Marines individually and noticing the work they were doing. After the exercise, those who performed exceptionally well were awarded with medals, meritorious masts, or recognition in front of the detachment. I found that those who were recognized did not become complacent but worked even more diligently after the exercise, while those not recognized set a goal to earn awards in the future.

Mentor

Mentoring is the final element of the TEAM principle and should be continuous as well. The dictionary defines *mentor* as a trusted counselor or guide. Articles in the *Marine Corps Gazette* reveal that some believe mentoring is an art that cannot be formalized, while others believe mentoring is a science that should be for-

malized. I submit that mentoring is a tool that leaders should use constantly. Mentoring should never become formalized because it is nothing more than taking the time to express a personal or professional experience to someone that may enhance his job performance. Mentoring is not only top-down and bottom-up, but also side-to-side. It should not be formalized in the form of a strict mentor-protégé relationship, as some have suggested, but should be open and continuous for all.

Mentoring can be specific, general, immediate, or long term and really boils down to this: If someone has experience or unique knowledge, then that knowledge should be shared with everyone, regardless of rank. The primary benefit of mentoring is the open lines of communication that will be fostered within an organization. Sir Isaac Newton had this to say when asked how it was that he knew so much: "The reason I see as far as I do is because I stand upon the shoulders of giants."⁷ When experiences are shared, learning grows exponentially.

The primary reason service members left the military last year was that they lacked confidence in their leaders. Obviously, to inspire confidence, leaders must be proficient in their jobs. To inspire the confidence that leads to retention, though, leaders must take the time to mentor and be mentored. The result will be an implied message that the leader values others more than he values himself. A leader who mentors shows an interest in and an appreciation for his subordinates. Mentoring builds trust and mutual respect. In addition, when leaders encourage an atmosphere of constant mentoring, their subordinates will develop a feeling of self-worth and a sense of belonging. As a result, subordinates will be motivated to remain in service. I have gained enormous confidence in and respect for the leaders who have taken the time to mentor me.

Not mentoring or adhering solely to strict mentor-protégé relationships isolates those individuals without an assigned mentor. Every single person in an organization should be a protégé, not just a select few, as a formalized program would create. Furthermore, if mentoring is not encouraged, then the underlying message is that the leader does not really care about the growth of his subordinates. During the exercise in 1997, I encouraged an open exchange of mentoring. I shared with the crew sergeants management techniques I had learned, and the gunnery sergeant shared with me her experiences with preparation for an exercise evaluation. The corporals taught me the technical aspects of their work, and I taught them the relevance of their tasks to the bigger picture. The bottom line is that we were all taking time to mentor one an-

other, and as a result, we accomplished great things. Professional business publications identify the power of mentoring: "In the heroic organizations, people mentor each other unselfishly."⁸

The TEAM Principle Works

Good leaders strive to build and maintain effective teams. By following the TEAM principle, leaders can establish teams that will work together to accomplish missions and goals. Once team goals become more important than individual goals, the organization achieves maximum efficiency: "An organization operates most effectively when its members think of themselves as belonging to one or more groups characterized by high levels of loyalty, cooperation, morale and commitment to the group mission."⁹ Through application of the TEAM principle, one is rewarded with individuals who value themselves and their leader. Subordinates feel challenged, responsible, important, and confident in themselves and their leader.

What General John Lejeune wrote so many years ago is still true: "The young American responds quickly and readily to the exhibition of qualities of leadership on the part of his officers." All leaders, regardless of their charisma or natural abilities to lead, can enhance their effectiveness through scientific application of the TEAM principle. I adhered to the TEAM principle during a challenging leadership event in my career and found that the Marines became more committed to the exercise and to one another than to themselves. The TEAM principle works. Military leaders who use it will grow as leaders. They will also have the satisfaction of knowing that they contributed to the retention of the fine young Americans we are privileged and entrusted to lead.

¹U.S. Marine Corps, *Warfighting, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government, 1999), p. 46.

²*Fleet Marine Force Manual*, p. 85.

³Zachary Martin, "Getting Serious about NCO Leadership," *Marine Corps Gazette*, January 2000, p. 51.

⁴United States Marine Corps, *Command and Control, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government, 1989), p. 114.

⁵Wes Roberts, *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* (New York: Warner Books, 1987), p. 79.

⁶James Kouzes, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), p. 275.

⁷Katherine Karvelas, *Winning with Teamwork* (New Jersey: Career Press, 1998), p. 88.

⁸Karvelas, *Winning with Teamwork*, p. 17.

⁹*Command and Control*, p. 88.

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