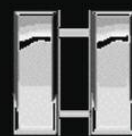


CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders

From: Company Commanders

The Leader Challenge Approach

When we immerse ourselves in the tough, real-life challenge of another leader, we hone our judgment and we grow more prepared for our own future challenges.

Imagine that you are in Afghanistan. You are 1LT Abdullah Clark, an infantry company executive officer in the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment. On one mission, you are leading a company (minus) dismounted patrol. Your company commander, who is back at the outpost, is intentionally having you lead this company mission for your development. The mission has gone well, but as you egress past a village along the route back to the outpost, you come under heavy fire. Bullets are flying; rocket-propelled grenades are exploding; your heart is racing. The company first sergeant begins to take charge. He's charismatic, highly experienced and super

aggressive. He is directing Soldiers to break contact and continue bounding back in the direction of the outpost. Your company commander, on the other hand, is on the radio talking to you, and he directs you to "close with and destroy the enemy!" You see, your commander has a UAV up—a drone—and through the video feed, he's watching the building from which the enemy is firing at you. What are you going to do—listen to the company commander and close with the enemy, or go along with what the first sergeant is already putting in motion? And not only *what* are you going to do, but *how* are you going to do it?

We learn to lead primarily through experience, and the most developmental experiences are the tough, challenging ones that push us out of our comfort zones, like what 1LT Clark experienced when he was thrust into the hot seat. With this in mind, we, the Company Command team (<http://CC.army.mil>), created the Leader Challenge project. We ask leaders around the Army to describe hard-hitting, dilemma-type experiences they've had. We then bring those video clips into an interactive online environment (or a face-to-face session) where Leader Challenge participants put themselves into the protagonist's shoes. In the process, participants are immersed in the real-life challenge of a leader. It's not a hypothetical scenario; it's an actual situation filled with uncertainty and discomfort that places participants in the hot seat and forces them to take on different perspectives.

First Lieutenant Clark's story, for example, is the vehicle to place you into his experience. As you articulate what you would do, and exactly how you would do it, new connections begin to emerge. You are vicariously experiencing his challenge! As you engage in facilitated small-group discussions, your assumptions are challenged, you're exposed to courses of action you never considered, and along with your fellow participants, you'll likely identify second-order effects and implications that you initially didn't think about. By immersing yourself in the scenario and engaging in vi-

brant conversation with others about it, you are gaining vicarious experience, and you will develop judgment and frameworks for effectively leading through the challenging experiences that await you in the future.

There are two ways that you can leverage the Leader Challenge approach to develop leaders: through an interactive online environment and through a dynamic face-to-face engagement.

Take the Leader Challenge Online

■ The Leader Challenge online platform (LC.army.mil) is accessible to select members of Army Professional Forums (APF), which is hosted on milSuite (<https://www.mil-suite.mil>). You must be a member of one of APF's "leader forums" for NCOs, warrant officers, platoon leaders, company commanders or S3 XO's. When you arrive on the Leader Challenge home page, you will see a list of all the Leader Challenges.

■ When you select and click on a particular Leader Challenge, you begin the three-step experience that starts with watching the short video clip of the leader describing the challenge:

What would you do in this situation? Watch the Leader Challenge introductory video clip and in no more than 500 characters, answer the questions: What are your considerations; what would you do?

So, what did the real 1LT Clark do? That is what we call “The Rest of the Story” in a Leader Challenge. It’s not necessarily the right answer; rather, it is what actually happened. Because it’s real life, the outcome can be ambiguous, which creates more conversation and the possibility for more learning to emerge. First Lieutenant Clark’s “Rest of the Story” is that the company had recently lost a well-respected squad leader and two Soldiers, and no one wanted to lose another Soldier. Instead of con-

fronting the first sergeant, 1LT Clark grabbed his radio telephone operator and his fire support officer and began moving toward the enemy. When the first sergeant saw what was happening, he stopped dead in his tracks and supported 1LT Clark. They closed with the enemy, doing so in a way that limited collateral damage to the village. The enemy got away, but the unit gained intelligence and sent a message to the villagers about its competence and resilience.

Compare your response with others. As soon as you submit your response, you are granted access to the responses of those who have already taken the challenge. As you read through other members’ responses, you can vote responses as helpful and comment on them.

Learn the rest of the story. You then get to watch the “Rest of the Story” video clip, in which the protagonist describes what actually happened. You can also access additional resources such as related articles, doctrine and so on. These resources foster additional learning and connections to existing knowledge and make each Leader Challenge a complete leader-development package ready for you to use, either for self-development or as a catalyst for leader development and learning in your unit or classroom environment.

Conduct a Leader Challenge Workshop

Leader Challenge Workshops are engaging, interactive, face-to-face sessions that can be used in unit leader professional development (LPD) or in classroom settings. We have even witnessed platoons across an infantry battalion (2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment) doing a Leader Challenge Workshop with all the Soldiers participating.

When a group meets to discuss the Leader Challenge, its participants should be divided into huddles of three to five participants, with one designated facilitator per huddle. The workshop typically begins with watching the Leader Challenge video and facilitators asking participants, “What are your considerations? What would you do?” The method includes three rounds of conversation, with participants splitting to form completely new huddles each round and the facilitator staying in

Company commanders can develop their leadership skills in an interactive online environment—the Leaders Challenge (LC) interface—in which they consider and describe how they would react to situations related by the leaders who experienced them.

place. The movement of the participants is crucial to the success of the method, which scales from small (eight to 12 participants) to very large (more than 600 participants), depending on the space available.

A Leader Challenge package includes a “facilitator quad chart” with recommended questions to drive the conversation in each round. It is a starting point from which facilitators can adjust depending on the goals of the specific workshop.

Another proven element of the method is the use of easel paper to visually capture insights in the huddles. The notes and diagrams become a history of the learning for a particular huddle, artifacts that the facilitator uses to brief newly arriving participants and to build upon with each round. After the third round, participants stay in place and go directly into the close-out discussion.

Keys to Success

- Designate and prepare huddle facilitators ahead of time. An effective way to prepare facilitators is by having them take the specific Leader Challenge online before you meet to rehearse. Then, meet and review the facilitator quad

LC 15 Aftermath

Step 1
What would you do in this situation?
Watch the video and respond below.

Step 2
Compare your response with others. Read, "vote helpful" and "comment" on members' responses.

Step 3
Watch the "Rest of the Story" and access additional resources.

INSTRUCTIONS
What are your considerations? What would you do?

SITUATION
There is another Task Force who comes into my area of operation to conduct a raid. At the end of the day, they end up firing about six HIMAR rockets into the village. Lots of AC130 usage. So, I get guidance within the week to conduct an assessment of the village. I am hesitant to push in given the task organization I have. So my platoon sergeant said, "Hey sir, when I was in a valley similar to this on a previous deployment with the 82nd, this was a battalion size objective."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
[LC15_Aftermath_\(Mission_Scenario_Map\).pdf \(186.1 K\)](#)

Put yourself in this leader's shoes. What are your considerations? What would you do?

Post Response ** 500 Character Limit **



Cadets at West Point conduct an LC as part of their Professional Military Ethic Education program. Every cadet platoon leader, mentored by an officer, leads the monthly exercise for his or her cadets, with senior cadets serving as group, or “huddle,” facilitators.

chart to ensure that all the team is on the same sheet of music. Facilitators can be peers to the participants. They will be more committed and will learn more because of their role.

- Keep facilitators in place at their respective tables throughout the workshop, but have all the other participants move between rounds so there are all-new participants in the huddles for the second and third rounds. Ideally, no two Soldiers will be in the same huddle more than once.

- Designate a timekeeper and stick to the time line. Keep the first round brief; this sets the conditions for subsequent rounds to be effective. (It gets the juices flowing, while protecting time for the other rounds.)

- Have facilitators begin each round by welcoming the new participants and orienting them to the key insights that have emerged so far at that table, using the easel paper and notes. Participants begin the second and third rounds by sharing one key insight from their previous huddle, enabling the cross-leveling of ideas and insights.

- Participants do most of the talking. The facilitators' key role is to ask questions that spark thought and conversation to stretch participants' thinking.

- Use devil's advocate and role-playing facilitation techniques. A devil's advocate challenges the huddle's consensus and causes participants to wrestle with their assumptions. Role-playing encourages participants to act out what they would say or do rather than just talk about it in the third person.

- Be positive, inspiring and energizing (and treat every person as a valuable member of the profession).

- Trust the process and have fun. It

doesn't get much better than this!

So far, 21 Leader Challenges have been published. Some of the topics include: rules-of-engagement decisions; ethical dilemmas; interpersonal conflicts; being given a tactical order you do not agree with; managing the tension between taking care of Soldiers and accomplishing a mission; and leading through crises such as the

loss of a Soldier. The following examples will give you a better feel for what Leader Challenge vignettes are like. As you read them, imagine a leader telling the story on videotape:

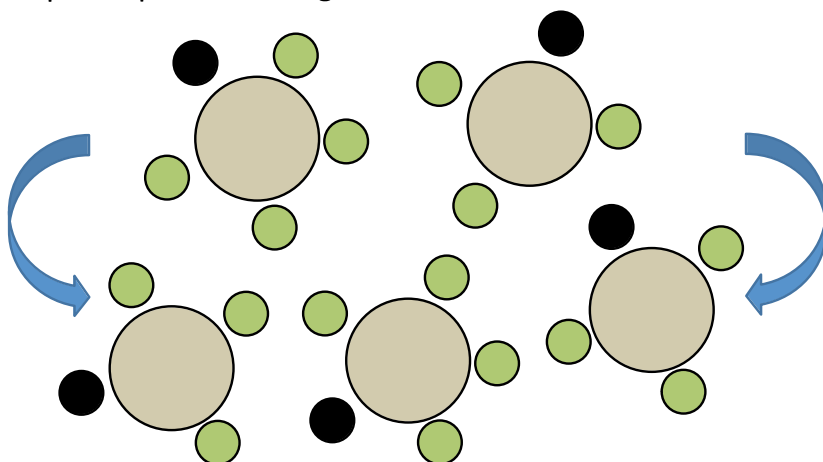
“My best friend Robbie was killed by an IED. That night was a long and emotional night. The very next morning, LTC Jones called me in to tell me I was moving from the battalion operations office to take over Robbie's platoon—immediately!”

“We were high up in the mountains observing a favorite enemy ambush location. Are those insurgents on the rooftop, or are they innocent goatherders? I see a weapon; yes, that looks like a weapon. Do you see the weapon? My



Officers and NCOs interact in huddles during an LC at Fort Benning, Ga. LC workshops can be used in unit leader professional development or classroom settings. Participants should be divided into huddles of three to five per table.

Conduct a LC Workshop: 3 rounds of conversation, with participants moving to a new “huddle” each round.



Dynamic, inspired, high-energy interactions about real-life challenges that a leader recently faced.

Each huddle should include a designated facilitator.

forward observer sitting next to me says, ‘Yes, I’m pretty sure that is a weapon!’ We are too far away to engage with direct fire, and I can’t make radio communications with our mounted patrol that is coming up the road any minute. That is the same spot where one of our guys was killed last week. Crap, what am I going to do?”

“Once we passed the eight-month mark, I started witnessing my second squad leader growing more and more risk-averse. One morning in the chow line, I overheard PFC Jones talking about how they sat in a building for eight hours instead of patrolling—something that, if true, is at odds with what the squad leader reported in his patrol debrief.”

“Coming back from an all-night foot patrol, SGT H. was hit by an IED. He didn’t make it. After getting him medevaced out, I began thinking about what I was going to tell the platoon once we got back to our base. Then the commander called and gave me a direct order to clear the nearest village, where the guys who put in the IED could be located—a mission that would easily take eight hours. My guys were out of food and water, already physically smoked and in a bad state of mind. There’s no way

those people [Iraqis in the village] did not know something about that IED. Then my platoon sergeant says to me, ‘Sir, there is no way we can do this mission. Look at the guys!’ At that point, my company commander called again to find out why I wasn’t moving to the village. What do I do?”

These are the kinds of challenging experiences that our small-unit leaders in the Army are having. Situated in the Leader Challenge online forum, the stories become a cutting-edge leader-development curriculum across the three pillars of Army leader development. Leaders can use the Leader Challenge as a vehicle for self-development (participate online), leverage it for unit leader development (as the basis for an LPD) and integrate it into the curriculum to support existing learning objectives in the Army education system (for example, at the Maneuver Captains Career Course).

The Leader Challenge approach to developing leaders is grounded in work done in the 1990s at West Point and in partnership with the Army Research Institute and Yale University, which included the “Tacit Knowledge for Military Leaders” study that culminated with a book, *Practical Intelligence in Everyday Life*. Furthermore, the small-group discussion techniques, including rotating participants and use of easel paper, are informed by experiential learning theory and the World Café technique for conversations (*The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*). The approach has been iteratively tested and improved for the last 13 years with periodic funding sponsored by the Army Chief Information Officer/G-6 through the Army Studies

First Lieutenant Abdullah Clark shares his LC story with 500 West Point cadets in the “MX400: Officership” course while a picture of his First Sergeant is projected on the screen behind him.



Program. The method has been integrated at West Point and is being adopted in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Captains Career Courses, Basic Officer Leader Courses and operational units. The feedback is overwhelmingly positive.

Feedback Examples

“The Leader Challenges are amazing. We just did one with every squad leader and above in the conference room for the last 90 minutes. Great stuff, and the leaders loved it. Teaching this stuff in a group setting is beneficial because it flushes out different perspectives, points and counterpoints. Please keep them coming.” —Company commander



“This was the most real-life developmental experience I have had so far at USMA [U.S. Military Academy]. No other leadership course or PME [professional military ethic] class has been as clearly applicable to me and my future as the Leader Challenge series. I am better prepared to enter the Army.” —Cadet at West Point



“I like the Leader Challenges because they force you to very succinctly explain a difficult choice. I find them to be a good tool to generate conversation with my lieutenants

about battlefield ethics. The first one we did, I assigned as homework. The next two we did at work, where I applied a short time hack to force them to quickly choose and explain themselves. Using the basic Leader Challenge construct, my 1SG and I developed additional scenarios based on my NCOs' previous combat tours, which we used with all the Soldiers in the unit. As a result, we were able to talk about ethics in general, and I was able to lay out my own expectations. We all know that a commander cannot be everywhere at all times, and I want my subordinates to make the appropriate judgment decisions when called upon to do so.” —Company commander



“We are using two drill sergeant Leader Challenges as an integral part of how we bring new drill sergeants into our brigade. It is a powerful way for leaders to shape unit culture.” —Brigade commander

Benefits of the Method

- Captures real-life challenges that actual leaders have recently faced.
- Situates learning in rich context (not a context-stripped, hypothetical case study).

<div style="background-color: #92d050; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Round 1</div> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>You are the acting commander, LT Clark</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watch the LC Intro video. 2. What is going on? [describe the situation] 3. What are your options/considerations? 4. What would you do? <p>Background Context: <i>One of your strongest Squad Leaders and 2 Soldiers were killed a few days prior to this event.</i></p>	<div style="background-color: #92d050; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Round 2</div> <p>Brief new arrivals to the huddle using notes taken on easel paper and cross-level knowledge (Key insights Round 1).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make the case for why you should go along with what the 1SG is already doing. Role-play the conversation with the Cdr. 2. Make the case for why you will close with the enemy. Role-play the conversation with the 1SG. 3. Watch “Rest of Story” video.
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 0 auto; width: 80%;"> <p style="margin: 0;">LC: “XO Under Fire”</p> <p style="margin: 0; font-size: small;">Leading by Example; Calm Under Pressure; Mission vs Soldiers; Painting the Picture to Higher; Cdr/1SG Relationship.</p> </div>	
<div style="background-color: #92d050; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Round 3</div> <p>Brief new arrivals to the huddle using notes taken on easel paper and cross-level knowledge.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the impact on the villagers if you break contact? Close with the enemy? 2. What if a number of Soldiers were killed in the process of closing with the enemy? Does that change your perspective? 3. What effect could this experience have on the relationship with your 1SG and/or CO? 	<div style="background-color: #92d050; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Close</div> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What have we not discussed that needs to be discussed with this scenario? 2. How does this scenario relate to something you have experienced? 3. What is your key takeaway from this scenario and discussion? <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;"> <p style="font-size: small;">Experience more Leader Challenges at http://LC.army.mil</p> </div>

An LC workshop typically begins with a video clip of a leader describing a challenging situation.

* * *



Company commanders in the Pennsylvania National Guard watch the video that opens an LC workshop in Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.

To be physically fit for our mission, Army leaders conduct PT every day. If you consistently do challenging, functional PT, you and your unit will be more effective in your mission. There is a direct causal effect there, which is easy to see. The same is true for exercising our leader judgment. To develop and maintain exceptional judgment, leaders must consistently do challenging, functional thought exercises. Leader Challenges are one effective way to do that. As you regularly immerse yourself in real-life leadership challenges in an environment that facilitates learning and development, you will develop and hone your judgment and become a more effective Army leader.

Join your professional forum and then integrate Leader Challenges into the way you develop yourself and your team. Learn more at LC.army.mil. If you have a challenging

leadership experience of your own that you are willing to share, please connect with us at cocmd.team@us.army.mil.

- Engages all participants in conversation and requires them to think through and articulate their thought process.
- Helps to reveal (and appropriately challenge) participants' underlying assumptions.
- Exposes participants to the thoughts and perspectives of other members of the profession.
- Becomes a catalyst to bring out the experiences (and tacit knowledge) of participants as they engage in conversation about the scenario.
- Gives facilitators valuable experience facilitating small-group conversation.
- Develops judgment and frameworks for effectively leading through the challenging experiences that characterize our profession.

Company commanders: Please join us in the new and improved version of our online professional forum to continue the conversation: <http://CC.army.mil>.



A Vision for Army Leaders

Take a Leader Challenge every month and then talk about it with other leaders when appropriate and relevant. To support this, we recommend (if necessary funding is provided) launching a new Leader Challenge in the first week of every month on a rotation that alternates between scenarios featuring an NCO, a company-grade officer and a field-grade officer. This design—having all leaders across the Army take the same Leader Challenge each month focusing on a different level of leadership—creates multi-echelon mentoring and leader development. It causes leaders to take on multiple perspectives by placing themselves in the shoes of the leader in the scenario and, in the process, to be exposed to the thought processes of different ranks. The potential exists for this to transform the way that Army leaders learn and develop, resulting in a more effective Army.

Connecting in conversation...
...becoming more effective.



Art by Jody Harmon

Have you joined your forum?