

STUDENT HANDOUT

Leadership Training

LESSON PURPOSE: To provide an overview of the philosophy of leadership, information on various leadership topics using the guided discussion method of training.

1. COMPOSITION OF THE GUIDED DISCUSSION: The guided discussion is made up of three basic components, they are:

a. A Leader: This person(s) control the discussion and makes sure all group members become active Participants.

b. A desired outcome or goal: This can be a solution to a problem, covering a topic, or something else.

c. A structure: Certain points need to be covered. Sometimes they need to be covered in a certain order or sequence. The leader controls the structure.

2. USE OF THE GUIDED DISCUSSION: Use of the guided discussion in most cases is going to be situation dependent. In choosing this method of training there are certain items you must take into account in order to achieve effective learning.

a. Group Size: If you are instructing small groups of personnel (usually less than 20) then the guided discussion can be effective, when dealing with groups larger you may experience control problems.

b. Preparation: Guided discussions require more preparation, patience, and mental quickness on your part as the leader, than other kinds of instruction but it can still make your job of teaching much easier. There are particular steps to follow to ensure your Soldiers learn and the guided discussions can help you do each of them -- and all at the same time:

(1) Allow practice: Practice may be the most important part of learning. In guided discussions, the members are always practicing by repeating and thinking about what they know and learning from the experiences of others.

(2) Determine Soldier's strengths and weaknesses: When you conduct good guided discussions, you know whether your Soldiers are studying and whether they know what they're supposed to know; and you know it now.

(3) Involve all discussion group members actively: In guided discussions, everyone participates and that means more than saying "Yes or No," or agreeing or disagreeing.

(4) Motivate your Soldiers: Part of being motivated is feeling part of the situation. When your group members participate, the instruction relates to them. It is automatically part of their life.

c. Time and Audience: The only two real obstacles you face in conducting guided discussions are time and group size. It usually takes longer to conduct a discussion of a subject than to lecture about it, small groups work best when choosing to use the guided discussion training method.

d. When to use Guided Discussions: When is the guided discussion the best method of training to achieve maximum learning on the part of your Soldiers? Lets look at an example: You are assigned to give a class on "Survival as a Prisoner of War". How would you train them? It depends on the purpose of the instruction.

Example 1: If the purpose of the instruction is simply to identify and describe what conditions you may experience if you become a prisoner of war, a lecture of those conditions might be sufficient.

Example 2: If the purpose of the instruction is to relay the feeling of being a prisoner of war, then a demonstration/experience might be the best method.

Example 3: If the purpose is to discuss the mental preparation for coping with the conditions you may experience as a prisoner of war, the guided discussion might be best.

(1) In each of the examples, the word "might" is used and that is because there is another thing you want to keep in mind, Guided discussions are dependent upon the group members. What experiences do the members bring to the group? In the previous example if your group was composed of former "POW" veterans then they could probably talk forever on their individual experiences and how they dealt with the conditions, but if your group were made up of Soldiers who had never experience the combat environment and were fairly new to the corps then the lecture or demonstration method would be better because of the groups little or no experience on the subject.

(2) Some groups will "teach" themselves; others may have very little to say; still other groups may require a mixture of discussion and "lecture" by the Discussion Leader (DL), though the "lecture" would be disguised as simply input from the DL. As a resource person, the DL must be prepared to stimulate discussion, to provide direction, and to get the most out of the time being spent. Without DL expertise and guidance, a group can flounder and end up in just another bull session.

3. ADVANTAGES OF GUIDED DISCUSSION:

a. Groups usually have more resources than individuals: Varying backgrounds and experiences, ensure new or different approaches.

b. Group members are motivate by the presence of others: It's natural that a Soldier wants to look good in front of a group. A desire to impress the group motivates each group member.

c. Group members may feel a stronger commitment and "esprit de corps": When your Soldiers solve their own problems or contribute to the unit's success, they tend to be more motivated to accomplish the tasks.

d. Participation leads to increased understanding: New ideas, thoughts, opinions, or approaches will increase each Soldier's knowledge and skill level. Informed Soldiers do better than those wearing blinders. We all can learn from each other.

e. Members acquire or improve communication skills useful in other situations: By discussing any issue, problems, requirements, or plan, you gain more information, new insights and knowledge, and an increased ability to analyze the situation and formulate a course of action.

f. Members teach each other by discussing their experience: The real learning experience comes from listening and participating as a group member.

4. DISADVANTAGES OF GUIDED DISCUSSION:

a. More time-consuming than other methods: Any time you open a subject up for discussion by your Soldiers it will take time.

b. Discussion can suppress convictions: As the discussion leader if you express your feelings on a subject first and then ask subordinates to give their opinions or views, you will probably get your opinions and views right back. The leader's opinions and group pressure may suppress opinions.

c. Discussion may substitute talk for action: Talking about "how to solve a problem" is not enough. You must be prepared to take action based on the group's impact. Don't say you will do something or change something unless you truly can. Soldiers want action, not talk (remember; actions speak louder than words!).

5. TASKS OF THE DISCUSSION LEADER (DL):

a. Prior To The Discussion:

(1) Select appropriate subject: Commanders select subjects to be taught based on the needs of their Soldiers; i.e. discipline, ethics, why "BST" is necessary, why the vehicle maintenance in the motor pool is unsat, etc. The subject can be selected in advance or on the spot.

(2) Select appropriate training objectives: Decide what there is about the subject you want your Soldiers to learn. Make your learning objectives clear and concise.

(3) Acquire knowledge and understanding of the subject matter: Although you do not desire the group to look at you as the duty expert, knowing this will stifle discussion, it is tough to guide a discussion if you do not have a basic understanding of the facts relating to the topic. As the DL, the result of the learning experience is dependent upon your knowledge and skill. If the group cannot answer a question you must be able to do so or to find the answer.

(4) Research backgrounds of group members: Basically, this means know your Soldiers. Another point to consider is that, based on experiences and assignments, certain Soldiers will be more knowledgeable on certain aspects of your subject than others. If you learn about your Soldiers' backgrounds, you may be able to get slow starters involved by relating questions to their personal experiences. For example, what elements of military strategy, like weather, terrain, and so on, are also factors in other aspects of life? When you think about your group, also think about their personalities and how well they express themselves verbally.

(5) Prepare a discussion leader's outline:

(a) This is simply a working guide with built-in flexibility. List your purpose, training objectives, possible questions and a direction. Mental outlines can work but writing your thoughts down will help you keep them straight. Annex A is a sample DL's outline.

(b) Along with each point you intend to cover, write down what media you intend to utilize while conducting the discussion. Are there points you can cover best by using a slide presentation? Showing a short film? Will you be using hand outs? Be referring to text quotes? Will you summarize or write down main points by using a transparency, chalkboard, or overlay? Using a sand table or maybe just a diagram drawn in the dirt? Consider every part of your discussion beforehand. The use of questions as a means of directing and stimulating discussion is one of the most effective techniques used by the DL.

(c) You also need to decide how long to spend on each point. Allow enough time for yourself and for the members to talk. It is important to let the group express themselves, and this often takes not only time but patience. Also allow time for prompting individuals or for helping them if they start stumbling. Your assistant DL can usually assist you in "watching" the time schedule.

(6) Prepare extra material: Parts of discussions often go quicker than expected. When this happens, you'll need to expand other parts of the discussion. If you've got a lively group, space can be filled simply by allowing more discussion. But you will also want to have extra material ready. For example, if you have one case study planned, have one in reserve too. Also, there is usually at least one point in any topic that "you wish there was more time to go into." Be ready, you may have the time!

(7) Check materials and facilities to be used:

(a) If in a classroom, check lighting, seats and equipment. If in the field, check the terrain for comfortable seating, check for other inhibitors such as poison ivy, snakes or security. For a balanced discussion, you'll find that a balanced seating arrangement will be necessary. Some individuals will be quick in their delivery; others, slow and deliberate. Some will speak a lot; others, only when prompted. To create a balance, spread these different types evenly throughout the group. Sometimes even the most passive people will become active when caught in a crossfire of discussion.

(b) Before you begin the discussion, set up any equipment or aids you plan to use. Also, arrange the seating. Round tables are preferable, but often not available. So you will probably need to place desks in a circle or elliptical arrangement. The ellipse is probably best if you have a slide or film presentation within the discussion. In the field just have your Soldiers find a nice "soft piece of terrain" to sit on.

(c) When preparing and leading discussions, it is desirable to have an assistant if possible. This individual could be a fellow NCO or anyone you choose. The assistant discussion leader (ADL) can help guide the discussion, operate training aids, or give summaries -- anything as you direct.

6. DURING THE DISCUSSION:

a. Set the stage: Tell your Soldiers what you are going to discuss. State the purpose of the discussion, the objective(s), and the major points to be covered. Also explain any media that will be used and any specific instructions you want understood before you start, set the ground rules (i.e., No smoking, no eating, no profanity, all members will participate, etc.).

Example: "Today we'll be talking about the importance of being a leader. Based on the handouts I have given you and on any personal experience you may have, we'll first look at people we might call leaders and what are the most important attributes of an effective leader.

Then we'll try to pick out characteristics, or traits, that make these individuals leaders. We'll also try and define leadership. Finally, we'll see a film of four people talking or working with others. After the film we'll decide whether or not they're leaders based on our definitions."

b. Start the discussion:

(1) The way you start a discussion is going to be your key to success, ensuring you create a relaxed atmosphere and obtaining trust at the beginning you will need at good transition to get the

group members started. Your transitions will usually be in the form of a question, or end in a question.

Examples: "Who can start by describing a person they think is a leader?" (If no one responds, consider calling on one of the more confident looking members.)

"Corporal _____, could you start by describing a person you think is an effective leader?"

or

"Let's start by describing someone and see if we think this person is a leader." (Then you mention someone to get the discussion going.)

Transitions are also a way of getting from one point to another, so you will want to develop good transitions to move the discussion from one main point to the next.

(2) In a guided discussion, you have the added advantage of being able to use the students' words as transitions. For example, after the introduction, a Soldier might ask "When you say "leader," do you mean someone who's in a leadership billet?", you may respond with "that's a good question. Have all the Soldiers we've known in leadership billets been "leaders"?"

(3) Other ideas are to show a film or use a case study to get them involved.

(4) Remember, the way you start the discussion is key to its success. Ensure you create a relaxed atmosphere and obtain their trust at the beginning.

c. Control the flow of discussion:

(1) The term discussion leader implies the leader has a predetermined plan and guides the discussion towards the objective. It is your duty as the DL to keep your Soldiers on the subject.

(2) Sometimes you may have to cut off discussion of a particular point to keep the discussion moving ahead. Here the trick is not to interrupt too much or stifle the discussion going on. Do this by waiting for an individual to reach the end of a thought. Then use positive statements to cut off the discussion.

Examples:

"That's an interesting point. I'd like to come back to that later if there's time."

"That's exactly what we want to get at. Now, Corporal Jones has proposed two characteristics of leaders; sincerity and perseverance. Can anyone think of others? How about the "Leadership Traits?" What do you think Corporal Walker?"

In both cases, you have taken back control. Also in the second case, you are politely telling Corporal Jones, "That's enough on that part of the discussion." Though your not wanting to appear as the duty expert still remember you are the DL and in control of the flow of discussion.

d. Control group participation:

(1) In a group discussion everyone should be involved and be adding to the discussion. The proper use of questions will help the DL control participation. There are three types of questions available to the DL. Two types, Direct and Overhead, can be done in advance and incorporated into the DL outline. The third, Redirect, is a spontaneous type question.

(a) Direct: Can be used to involve the Soldiers who are not taking part. Such as: "Cpl Brown why do you think a leader must set the example?"

(b) Overhead: Used to address the entire group. Such as: "Can someone give us an example of "courage"?"

(c) Redirect: A question directed to the DL but returned to the group as an overhead question, or to an individual as a direct question. Such as: if you (the DL) are asked to state the most important leadership trait by a participant, rather than answer the question yourself, you say, "That's a very good question, let's discuss it. Is there one trait that is most important?" (overhead question-redirecting original question).

(2) You want everyone to participate, but you don't want any one person dominating the discussion. To get quiet individuals to contribute more than "Yes" or "No" responses, ask questions that will require responses of more than one word, being careful not to intimidate this kind of person. Start him off with easy questions that require short answers and progress during the discussion to questions that require longer answers. For example, go from "Which of the qualities of leadership do you think are most important?" (which requires a single word answer) to "Here's a leader. What makes him/her a leader?" (which requires a much longer explanation). Remember; The question often determines how long the response will be.

(3) Watch your group members' "body language" for tell-tale signs of agreement and disagreement. By watching them you can better determine who to ask what question or when to direct an opinion about someone else's response.

e. Interject appropriate material from prior discussions: Since guided discussions can be a series of topics relating to each other, points made in previous leadership training which apply to the current discussion topic should be pointed out and "tied in."

f. Accomplish the Training objectives: The discussion leaders decide what they want their Soldiers to learn and calls them training objectives. If the Soldiers learn, you accomplished your mission. If they don't learn it all, then you must spend more time with the discussion or reevaluate your methodology.

g. Summarize and end the discussion:

(1) The DL should utilize, synthesize and summarize comments made by the group. Everything discussed should be periodically summarized. If possible, have a chalkboard, overhead projector, or easel close at hand to write down (or have your assistant) all important points or statements as they occur; this will aid the discussion and aid in summarizing the main points later. Also, help group members shorten long answers by summarizing them, while not changing the statement's meaning.

(2) Summarize at the end of each main point. If the points have been made clear, this will usually only require your repeating those points. Again, only use the terminology supplied or agreed on by the group. Otherwise, you might be asked questions like, "What did you say that meant?" or "That's not what we said, was it?"

(3) Finally, summarize the entire discussion. Once again, restate the objective - the purpose of the discussion. This time, though, you should expand the statement to include any solution or conclusion that the group has reached. For example, "So we've decided today that persons recognized as leaders are ones who know their jobs, who know themselves, and who take care of their Soldiers."

7. COMMON MISTAKES:

a. Failure to be prepared: This is the most common mistake that DL's make. They often think they can "wing it" and fail to organize, plan, and research the topic sufficiently. A leader must know his subject. Guiding a good discussion is not an easy task, and the quality of the learning experience is heavily dependent upon your ability to do your job as the DL.

b. Becoming the "duty expert": This means talking too much and providing all the answers. If you want your Soldiers to discuss a subject, keep quiet and let them discuss it. The "duty expert" can suppress responses and ruin the effectiveness of the group discussion. It can become a "selling of the boss's point of view" vice a group learning experience or decision process. Avoid preaching, moralizing, and lecturing.

c. Answering questions from the group: This overlaps with being the "duty expert." If the DL solves the group's problems, it really isn't a discussion. Force your Soldiers to help solve each other's problems or, as a team, solve their own. Although there may be times the DL needs to answer a question, the purpose is only to get the discussion on track or clear up a point.

d. Failing to use interim summaries: The purpose of any summary is to reemphasize main points already covered. If you cover more than one main point or if the discussion lasts more than an hour, the interim summary will help transition from one main point to another, plus review what has been covered.

e. Failing to accomplish Training Objectives: The training objectives were set by you, the DL, based on what you wanted your Soldiers to learn from the discussion. If your Soldiers do not learn, then you have failed to accomplish your objective.

f. Allowing side conversations: In any training evolution, you want the full attention of your Soldiers. This is particularly true with discussion group learning situations. Side conversations are distracting to other group members and prevent the personnel involved in these side conversations from keeping up with the "actual" discussion flow. Only one person should talk at a time, after all we can only effectively listen to one at a time. Ways to regain attention are:

(1) Direct a question to one of the Soldiers in the side conversation.

(2) Ask the side group to contribute their ideas to the entire group.

g. Allowing group members to work on other material: This can have the same effect as side conversations.

h. Allowing an argument to develop: Soldiers tend to get excited about some topics which can lead to arguments. Remember you are the leader. Use questions to get viewpoints of other Soldiers. This should stop the argument, and also get a majority viewpoint. For example: "What do you think about what Corporal Smith and Corporal Jones were talking about?"

i. Losing track of the discussion's flow: This usually happens if the DL is studying notes or the

lesson outline and not listening to the discussion. The only solution is to know your subject, and pay attention at all times.