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Running Head: ACQUIRING LEADERSHIP: MY EVOLUTION

Acquiring Leadership: My Evolution

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Abstract

This personal experience paper provides a history of my leadership experience throughout my entire career in the United States Army. This personal experience paper covers my initial assignment to the Infantry, United States Army Recruiting Command, and other leadership roles.

The most accurate way to describe my evolution, as a leader is to define what it is to be a leader. Webster's Dictionary defines leadership as the position of office of a leader; capacity, or ability to lead (1988). This is a very vague explanation at best. Army Field Manual 6-22 says, Leadership is influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation, while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization (2006). I believe, Leadership is about leading in such a way that people accomplish the mission, because they believe letting you down is unacceptable.

The question we ask ourselves on a daily basis is where did we learn our primary traits. Ask any soldier about where he went to basic training they instantly begin by talking about their drill sergeants. They remember their names despite how long ago they went to basic training. This is also where I learned some of the leadership skills I use to this very day. I watched my Drill Sergeant as he commanded respect and took charge immediately in every situation. Drill Sergeant Chipchase taught us that you don't die for a flag or even your country. You will die for the man on your left or right. After a while, I began to understand the depth of what that really means. This synthesized in my mind to mean you must become what you expect your Soldiers to be.

SFC Mita was my First Platoon Sergeant. I learned a lot of great leadership traits from him. The foremost thing I learned was leadership is about sacrifice. Staying late to work with new Soldiers so that they can get the most from training and be ready to accomplish the mission. Soldiering is about being ready to do what is asked of you without fear or second thoughts? These were lessons that I will use for my entire life, they are lessons I strive to teach others.

Another mentor I learned from was First Sergeant Doody. 1SG Doody taught me the lesson that fear is just what it is; fear. He taught me to react and not second-guess myself. I watched my First Sergeant perform his duties above and beyond what is normally expected of a leader. On the 3rd of October 1993 in Somalia I saw 1SG Doody run through enemy fire to rescue a wounded man. This was moving beyond anything I had ever seen. The spirit and the desire to win under whatever the circumstances are the things I valued the most he taught me. He had no fear, he had no regard for his personal safety. The only thing that he was even remotely concerned with was the safety of the Soldier being evacuated. I saw this as the ultimate example of Be, Know, and Do. Leading by example, leading from the front, and deeds not words are the truest example of leadership.

Evolution as defined by Webster's Dictionary as a gradual process in which changes into a different and usually better or more complex form (1988). My evolution began on Oct 3, 1993 as a young squad leader. I led my squad on eight separate combat missions. I thought I had everything under control. Little did I know, the sequence of events that day would forever change the way I think about leadership. I learned that it isn't what you say, rather what you do that really matters.

Change came very quickly once we hit the ground and the fight for our lives began. About forty-five minutes into the fire-fight, I was wounded and could no longer move. I made a decision that would not only effect myself, but would effect the entire squad. Once my Soldiers had bandaged what they could of my wounds. I told them to move back into there positions, and stay under cover. I knew if we had called for a MEDAVAC or even for someone to get me out of position, it would have put him

or her at an unnecessary risk of being wounded or killed by enemy fire. I knew I was still in good enough shape that I could direct the squad and accomplish my mission. I knew what my Soldiers were thinking. They wondered if he was going to leave us out here to fend for ourselves while he is being evacuated to the rear. This was unacceptable to me no matter the circumstances. I chose to stay and fight no regardless of what happened to me. In the end I brought every single one of my Soldiers home in one piece. My evolution occurred and, more importantly, I knew what it took to be a leader. Personal sacrifice is the truest and purest example of leadership I had ever experienced.

My transition came on 22 August 1996. I became a field recruiter in the Oklahoma, City recruiting battalion. Recruiting duty was at first a pain beyond all that I thought I could bear. The more I thought about it, the more I came to realize that recruiting is a vital portion of what keeps the Army rolling. Without Soldiers going out and finding citizens who are willing to serve this great nation, how can we function? The answer to that is of course we can't function without recruiting. Thus, began a new chapter in my Army career, helping citizens support their country.

In my opinion, leadership in the United States Army Recruiting Command at first left something to be desired. My first station commander, sat at his desk and provided no leadership. He was like a bad Nike commercial, just go out there and do it. No leadership, no mentoring, just do it. Since I had been wounded and knew that staying in recruiting was going to be one of my very few options, I lead myself until better leadership was provided. That leadership came in the form of SFC Busby, the new Station Commander. He was a superb leader and a Soldier's Soldier. He exemplified leadership. SFC Busby showed you how to accomplish the mission. Once again, an

example of Be, Know, and Do. I learned more about what USAREC does in fifteen minutes from SFC Busby than I had learned from my previous leadership in a year. The most important lesson was that leading from the front isn't just on the battlefield; it is in all aspects of life. When I became a Station Commander and got my own Recruiting Station, I put these lessons into action.

My very first Recruiting Station was the Stillwater Recruiting Station in Stillwater, Oklahoma. This Station failed to make mission for several years. Leadership in the Station was weak. There were no standards to follow. Enforcement of standards is the way we accomplish the mission and lead Soldiers. Empowerment of the Soldier let them know the tasks, as well as what is expected of them. Then you go out and show them how to accomplish the task, just like leaders do any other job in the Army. My Station caught on, they did so well that I was meritoriously promoted to Sergeant First Class. I emphasize this point, I didn't get promoted because I did well, I got promoted because my Soldiers did their job, and did it well.

The next challenging Recruiting Station I was assigned to was the Memorial Recruiting Station, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Often every Soldier and leader falls into the trap of listening to previous leaders when it comes to a certain unit. Time and time again, leadership, as well as Soldiers, told me that Memorial Recruiting Station would never succeed. This, just like every unit I had ever been in, became successful. I applied the techniques I learned in the Infantry, and from my first Station Commander. After some trial and error, I convinced my Soldiers in that station that they could succeed. They needed to follow proper guidance and have a winning attitude. After a very short time, we got on track, soon afterwards we became one of the most successful Stations in the

Battalion. My Soldiers did so well that I was selected for promotion to Master Sergeant. Once again I would like to emphasize that it wasn't my success that got me promoted, it was the success of my Soldiers. Anyone who believes that they get anywhere on his or her own is a fool. The key to any great leaders success is having successful Soldiers. Successful Soldiers are given clear and defined examples of what is right and when it's right to do it. Truly successful leaders should never take an ounce of credit. They give the Soldier as much credit as they can as often as they can. Where would any of us be without our Soldiers?

I believe the most important of all leadership lessons is that your Soldiers must trust, believe, and know you have their best interests at heart. Truly successful units always have their Soldiers' best interests in mind. Those interests should be mission accomplishment, Soldier welfare, and enhancing junior leadership for the betterment of the unit. Plans must start with the basics; they are attainability, believability, and achievability, these should be part of all leadership tool kits.

The best practice in the end is to begin developing our Soldiers into leaders from the very first day they come to us. Through mentoring and counseling we can guide them. This way we can be proud of them and know that the Army will be in good hands. Remember this; we are products of those who came before us. All of us have had at least one leader who just couldn't get it done. The question is, have you ever been described as a weak leader, you can only hope that you haven't been. Once again, I would encourage each leader to take more time to develop subordinates, peers, and themselves. Never be so proud of yourself that you refuse to take advice from others. This is not to benefit you, rather the young leaders around who look to you for guidance. The ones

Who in the end look to you for leadership and pass it on to others when you are long gone. Ask yourself at the end of the day, will those who I touched and led be better. Did I teach them the right way to lead others? In the end only those, who are touched, by the fruits of your labors, by the leaders you influenced, will know for sure.

References

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