



# CompanyCommand



## Building Combat-Ready Teams

**To:** Company Commanders

**From:** Company Commanders

CC is company commanders. We are in an ongoing professional conversation about leading Soldiers and building combat-ready teams. Company Commanders connect at: <http://CompanyCommand.army.mil>

## The Company-Level Leadership Newsletter

*Members of the CompanyCommand professional forum receive the Company-Level Leadership (C-LL) Newsletter via e-mail. The foundation of each newsletter is a leadership “nugget” up front (a story or insight focused on leading at the company level) and links to exceptional content that commanders have shared in the CC forum. Our goal with each newsletter is to spark your thinking and to connect you with ideas and content that will directly impact your effectiveness as you build a combat-ready team. Here are excerpts from two newsletters.*

### Is Your Company “PHAT”? (Newsletter #27)

Imagine that you are a heavy Field Artillery (FA) commander in Iraq today. Up until a few months ago, your “reason for being” as a FA unit revolved around quickly putting massive amounts of steel on target. Today, your guns and FDC equipment sit idle as you and your soldiers clear buildings, patrol, establish and operate check points, conduct crowd control, and do whatever else needs to be done to win the war. It seems that every branch and type of unit in the Army is facing new challenges. We believe that to excel in this environment, you have to be PHAT: Purpose driven, Humble, Adaptive, and Tenacious

**Purpose driven:** Your purpose as a unit goes beyond the roles and tasks that have defined it. As we step into new missions and situations, it is important that we stay grounded in our greater purpose, which entails serving our nation when called. In the context of your current situation, what would your Soldiers say is the unit’s purpose? When Soldiers have shared clarity around purpose and when that purpose drives everything they do, they become a force to be reckoned with.

You can cultivate understanding of and commitment to your unit’s purpose by inviting your Soldiers to the table of discussion—it isn’t something you can order to happen. Pull your leaders together to talk about the unit’s purpose and how that purpose fits into the bigger picture. Be open. Solicit input. Listen and be a catalyst for conversation rather than the “answer man.” Conversations transform, and it is critical that you create an ongoing conversation about purpose in your unit.

**Humble:** There is an old proverb that goes, “A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.” So it is with units. Does your unit have blind spots—areas of weakness not identified due to an overall lack of humility? Humble units—and humble leaders—are willing to take a hard look at themselves and call it as it is. They have the ability to see when they have a problem.

One way to “see” problems is to ask questions and to listen. One commander we know regularly pulls his junior leaders together and asks them, “What are we doing that might get in the way of us achieving our purpose?” In his words, “If you want to know the real deal, pull your SSGs together under a tree and ask them. But you better have thick skin, and you better be honest with them. Instead of taking it personally and getting defensive, I turn it around on them and let them come up with solutions. It is amazing, and they love it! It keeps me humble.”

**Adaptive:** “Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances.” —Sun Tzu

A less well-known Chinese military leader, Liu Ji (14th C.), put it this way: “The ability to gain victory by changing and adapting according to opponents is called genius.”

The New England Patriots in the World Cup Finals? Imagine Robert Kraft calling Bill Belichick to tell him that he had three months to get the Patriots ready to play—not in the Super Bowl—but in the World Cup finals. Although a football team playing in the international soccer championship game sounds pretty far-fetched, the situation many company commanders currently face has some interesting parallels. Belichick’s football players would have to fully commit to the challenge, quickly learn new skills and operating rules, and—most importantly—would have to adapt the way they think and

act to the new environment. This is still playing to win; it is in a different context and with different skills necessary for success.

Now, envision a heavy FA fire-direction-center (FDC) chief whose FDC competence is his source of credibility. It would be no surprise if he resisted a change in mission that included leaving the guns behind and taking on what have traditionally been light infantry and MP tasks. Yet that is exactly what is happening in some FA units. By the way, did we mention that the FDC chief still has to be prepared in a moment's notice to jump back into the FDC to execute a fire mission? It is still combat, but the context and the necessary skills are significantly different from those that many units have been prepared in the past to execute. How adaptive is your outfit? Are you embracing new challenges and preparing to win in the same way that a great team would?

**Tenacious:** An incredible example of a tenacious leader is MSG Roy Benavidez. In fact, he is the embodiment of all four of the attributes we are addressing. If you are interested in inspiring your soldiers to be tenacious warriors, ask one of them to read the Benavidez CMH citation in front of the unit. ...

Great Soldiers—and great units—are fiercely resolved to never, never give in—no matter how great the cost, no matter how great the challenge, no matter how extreme the sacrifice.

So, how PHAT are you? As we've written, a PHAT unit is Purpose driven, Humble, Adaptive, and Tenacious. Please join this conversation by posting a discussion comment to the newsletter. In the meantime, "gain some weight!"

### **Leaders Are Dealers of Hope (Newsletter #28)**

"Loss of hope, rather than loss of life, is the factor that really decides wars, battles, and even the smallest combats."

—Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart

Are your Soldiers living life, or are they existing day to day? Are they thriving or just surviving?

Meet PFC Espero. He survived an IED last week; his closest buddy didn't make it. As month five in the desert drags into month six, PFC Espero assures his wife back home that it's going to be OK; privately, he begins to doubt.

Alone, under continuous pressure and ongoing exposure to death and fear, the strongest Soldier can wear down. But Soldiers are not alone. Leaders create the conditions for our PFC Esperos to thrive, even when circumstances might justify otherwise.

Chaplain Darrell Thomsen tells us that "Influential leaders—leaders that make a difference, leaders that transform lives—are Dealers of Hope!" Their optimism "inspires, empowers, and enables people to believe they can do more than any circumstance dictates. Chuck Swindoll tells us that 'Life is filled with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.' Dealers of hope—optimistic leaders—radiate confidence that goals can be reached and difficulties are stepping stones to success."

We believe that leaders are a critical factor influencing whether PFC Espero thrives or survives. Pause now to reflect on the direction of your own leadership. Check your azimuth, and set in motion a unit-wide "azimuth check."

How is your attitude? First, your attitude powerfully influences the attitude of everyone in your unit. Second, your attitude is one thing that you can control. Ask Victor Frankl, who survived three years of gruesome circumstances at Auschwitz and Dachau. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl tells us that "everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Ask yourself, "What attitude do I want my unit to exude?" Then ask yourself, "What attitude am I living out daily?" Invite your 1SG and platoon leaders to give you personal feedback on this. As you become clear about the attitude you want your Soldiers to have as well as more aware of your personal attitude, the two will become aligned. ... We believe that YOU are the source of optimism—the source of hope—in your unit. We invite you to be a DEALER OF HOPE!

#### **Current Co Cdrs: Shape the direction of your upcoming newsletters.**

The CC forum is a voluntary, grassroots forum that is by and for company commanders. The forum and the newsletter are positive and practical—focused like a laser beam on the practice of company command and those things that are important to company commanders. If you are a current company commander, help shape the future focus of your CC forum and future newsletters by giving us insight into the most pressing issues you are dealing with right now as you lead Soldiers and build a combat-ready team.

#### **What is the #1 issue that you are dealing with right now?**

E-mail us at [cocmd.team@us.army.mil](mailto:cocmd.team@us.army.mil) and let us know. In the months ahead, we will focus on the things that are most important to you.

*If you are a current company-level commander or a commissioned officer preparing to take the guidon, we invite you to join our professional forum at <http://companycommand.army.mil>.*